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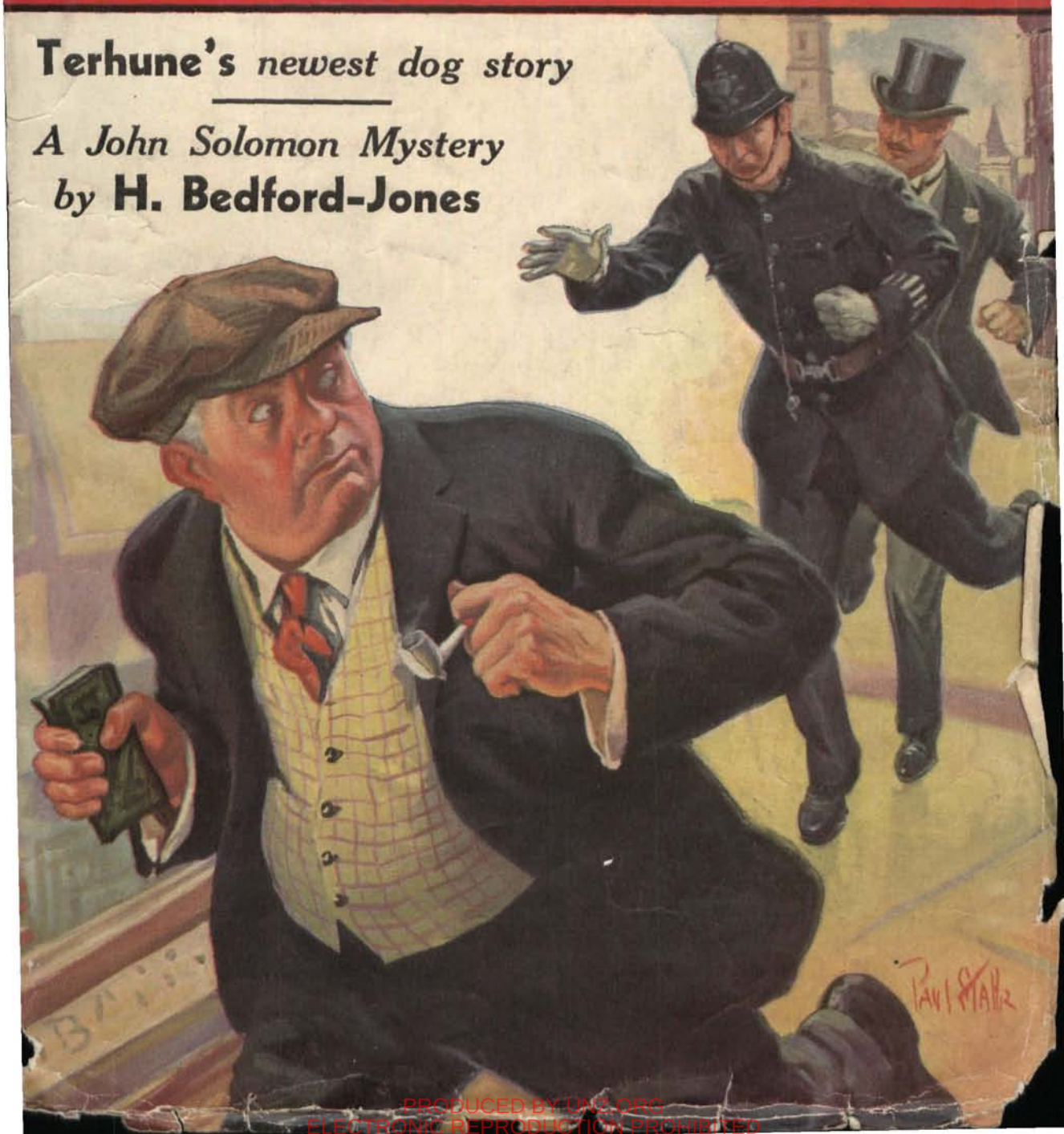

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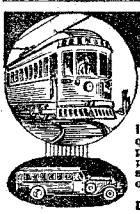

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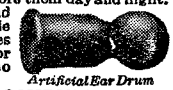

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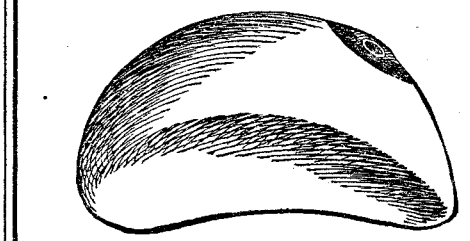

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Solomon was now firmly held by two of the crew

The Case of the Kidnaped Duchess

Novelette

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "The Deathly Island," "Isle of Destiny," etc.

"She 'as the greatest lot o' emeralds in the world. To get 'em Sir Basil would commit murder a 'undred times over," declared John Solomon

CHAPTER I.

SCOTLAND YARD IS RIGHT.

CARSON had just finished dressing, in his room in the Engineers Club. That enormous building in Whitehall Court, housing a dozen residential clubs, was like a rabbit warren until one got the hang of it.

A knock came at his door.

"Note for you, sir. Thank'ee, sir—"

Carson tore open the envelope. It was addressed to him in the neat, copperplate hand of John Solomon. Inside, also in that unmistakable chirog-

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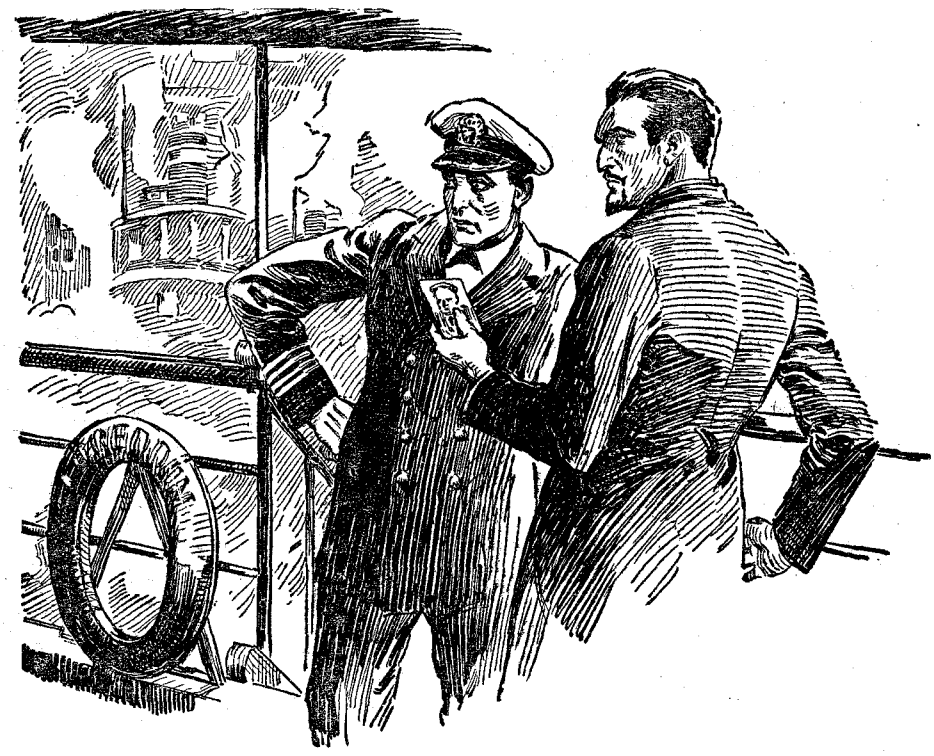

raphy, was a brief message which required no signature:

> Urgent. Meet me precisely nine o'clock outside window of tobacco shop south side of Strand at Temple Bar.

Bewildered, Carson read and reread the note in the keenest perplexity. Then he glanced at his watch. Eight-five. Time to get breakfast and keep that appointment, yes, but—

Why, the thing was preposterous, absurd! Even for London, where everything strikes an American as absurd.

Carson descended to the office, went to a telephone, and called Solomon's ship-chandler's shop in Limehouse. No response. Evidently no one there. He hung up and went into the breakfast room, frowning. He even neglected his morning paper, for once.

On the previous evening he had arranged to meet Solomon here at the club at noon. They were catching an afternoon plane together from Croydon for the Continent, on an errand of which Carson knew little. His chill gray eyes speculative, he recalled Solomon's exact words in regard to that errand:

"The worst kind of a job, sir. One that you and me together might swing, and 'elp out the most beautiful woman in Europe, Mr. Carson. But it's a werry dangerous business, sir. That 'ere Duchess o' Furstein is in a werry bad 'ole, and if we give 'er a 'and it means risking our necks—"

That was all Carson knew. Until now, this crazy note, of all things! If Solomon had wanted to appoint another meeting place, why this involved fashion of doing it?

Carson knew, however, that the little old ship-chandler, with his gro-

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tesque appearance and Cockney speech, was an extraordinary person; the most extraordinary he had ever met. The Limehouse shop was a mere blind. So, apparently, was the man himself. Behind those pudgy, expressionless features, behind those blank blue eyes, lay a brain of lightning rapidity, a personality of amazing resource and power.

This obscure, humble little man was distinctly not what he seemed. In reality, he moved behind the scenes of political power, in a singular fashion. Carson, who had been on the other side for several years and knew a little of alleged diplomacy himself, had been startled by Solomon's inside knowledge.

"But why the devil didn't he telephone me?" Carson asked himself, as he bolted his breakfast. "He does things in his own way, yes, but this looks asinine. He's got some reason for it, though; that means I'd better keep my brain clear."

In his brief acquaintance with John Solomon, Carson had acquired a vast respect for the pudgy little man's mental workings.

Presently he left the club and strode along the Embankment past the Strand underground station, where he cut up to the Strand by way of Essex Street. This brought him to his destination three minutes before nine. Knowing that when Solomon appointed an hour, he meant that hour to the very second, Carson loitered about.

The tobacco shop in question, a chain store, was the only one in the vicinity; no danger of any mistake. At one minute of nine Carson went in, bought some cigarettes, came out again, and stood in front of the window looking at the display of wares, as he lit a cigarette.

Nine o'clock; a minute past; another. Nothing happened.

Suddenly there was a quick, limping step, a panting breath. At the window, but not too close to him, appeared Solomon. Pudgy figure, shabby garments, wisps of gray hair protruding from the edges of a greasy cap—John Solomon, sure enough. Something fell to the sidewalk; a very small leather wallet, flat.

"Dang it!" came Solomon's voice. "Put your foot on it, 'ide it! Move sharp!"

It was not for nothing that this American with the gray eyes, the sharply chiseled features, the alert manner, had been chosen to work with such a man. Carson moved, almost mechanically, covering the little wallet with his foot. At the same moment Solomon turned and hurriedly entered the tobacco shop.

"There he goes! That's the man—in there, officer!"

Two men came dashing into the shop. One a "bobby" in helmet and uniform, the other a tall, distinguished looking man of forty, in silk topper and morning clothes.

Carson let his handkerchief fall. He stooped quickly, retrieved it, and with it the leather wallet. The latter he slid up his cuff.

ALREADY a crowd was collecting. The traffic officer from the intersection hurried along and held back the curious. Carson loitered at the window. Inside, he could see John Solomon being questioned. He went closer to the door, heard the indignant, whining Cockney voice.

"Wot, me? Why, blime, I don't know nothin' about it—I never seen this 'ere bloody toff before!"

"I could swear this is the man who

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jostled me!" exclaimed the "toff." "And a moment later I missed my wallet, officer. Search him—I demand it!"

"Sorry, sir; you'll have to lay a charge against him," said the officer. "We can't search him without his consent, you know, unless—"

"Search me, is it?" cried out Solomon loudly. "All right, search me! Nice way to treat an 'onest workin'-man, I calls it; but go on, search me! Out of 'is ruddy 'ead, that's wot 'e is. Search me, officer, and get it over with. I 'ave to meet a pal in no time at the pub in Chancery Lyne—"

Carson took the hint.

He edged his way out of the crowd, walked down Fleet Street, and turned left into Chancery Lane. A pub? Yes, there it was.

His step quickened. He entered and after securing a seat at a table, ordered an innocuous drink and lit another cigarette.

"So that was it!" he thought with a certain helpless admiration. "The confounded little miracle had me meet him there on the chance. If he didn't need me, all right. If he did, I was there—and he sure did. What the devil is he picking pockets for, anyhow?"

He had brought along his morning paper, as yet unread. Now, as he waited, he glanced through its pages. Suddenly the pictured face of a woman caught his careless glance; his eyes widened on it. Lovely, lovely! More than mere passing beauty in that face. Something in it struck at him. He looked to see the caption.

S. A. ALIXE, DUCHESS OF FURSTEIN.

Good Lord! Why—

He hurriedly folded over the paper, devoured the news story surrounding the picture. In the prosy fashion of English news stories, this related that among the guests arriving aboard the yacht of Sir Basil Lohancs, the famous industrial magnate of Central Europe, was Alixe, Duchess of Furstein.

The yacht was touching at London to-day, it appeared, in the course of an extended cruise.

"Our readers will remember," went on the story, "that three years ago the Duchess was forced to abdicate as a result of the social upheaval in Furstein. Then a mere girl, she is now said to be the most beautiful woman in Europe. Unfortunately, she has an aversion for society, being entirely engaged in social welfare work and economic improvements in Palermo, where she inherited the lovely Palazzo di Gonsido. Her Highness is said to have the most remarkable collection of emeralds in existence, which includes those formerly belonging to the Spanish crown."

Carson grimaced at all this. Emeralds, Sicilian palaces—hm! Didn't look as though this dame were in any great need of help. No longer a duchess, either, except to the English press, which for obvious reasons held that once a duchess, always a duchess. But good Lord, what a lovely thing she was!

"Yes, sir, werry pretty indeed, but that 'ere picture don't do 'er justice," said the voice of Solomon. "And she's in a werry bad fix, as the old gent said when 'e buried 'is third."

Carson glanced up at the pudgy little figure which stood beside him, glancing over his shoulder at the newspaper.

"Are you a mind reader, John?"

"Well, sir, it ain't werry 'ard to read your mind when you look at that 'ere picture," and with a wheezy chuckle

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John Solomon pulled out a chair and sat down at Carson's elbow. "A pint of 'alf and 'alf, miss," he said to the barmaid, and then got out knife and plug, shredding the black tobacco into his palm.

"You've got it safe, sir?" he asked, low-voiced.

"Yes." Carson regarded him curiously, but made no comment until the drink was brought and they could talk in peace.

"What's back of all this funny business anyhow. I thought we were leaving for Furstein this afternoon."

"I never said so," rejoined Solomon, his placid blue eyes showing nothing except a faint twinkle. "I 'ad a plane chartered to take us to Palermo; but dang it, I was too late. Days too late. I didn't get 'er message in time, that's all. And now they've got 'er."

Carson frowned. "Who's got her? Here's all about her in the morning paper—"

"I seen that 'ours ago, sir," and Solomon sighed. "That's what got me busy, so to speak, and a werry 'ard morning I've 'ad, if I do say it as shouldn't. Dang it! That 'ere Sir Basil almost 'ad me, for a fact. If you 'adn't been there—well, no matter now. A miss is as good as a mile, I says, and werry true it is."

"Sir Basil, eh? Was that the man in the silk hat? Odd!" said Carson. "According to this paper, his yacht doesn't arrive until to-day."

"Correct." Solomon held a match to his old clay pipe and puffed contentedly. "Werry likely 'e ain't aboard 'er, Mr. Carson. That was 'im, all right. One o' me men spotted 'im last night. Come by air, 'e did, to meet the yacht. Now let's 'ave a look at that 'ere wallet, sir. If it's got the telegram in it, we'll 'ave a chance to 'elp 'er after all."

CARSON slid the beautiful little wallet from his cuff. Solomon opened it, to disclose a gold monogram inside, and slid from it a folded blue paper and a ten-pound bank note. He opened the paper, then his blue eyes darkened.

"Dang it!"

Carson took the paper, saw that it was a telegram sent from Calais, and was addressed to Sir Basil Lohancs at the Cecil.

The message was a long one and was absolutely incomprehensible.

Solomon puffed at his pipe for a moment.

"Somebody aboard that 'ere yacht sent it from Calais early this morning, before they sailed," he muttered. "Dang it! Now I'll 'ave to call on the Foreign Office. They can break down that 'ere cipher in two or three 'ours at most. Werry good."

With a wheezy sigh, Solomon took the message and sought out a telephone, where he presumably read it off —to whom?

The Foreign Office? Carson was startled. Well though he knew the extent of this little Cockney's resources, this seemed a bit stiff. After a time, Solomon returned, wiping his rotund visage, and resumed his pipe and chair.

"We'll 'ave it later, sir. Werry lucky it was as you got me message in time to show up. That 'ere Sir Basil is a-going to think some snatcher copped 'is wallet, and won't get aroused, so to speak. Them 'ere Foreign Office experts is wonderful wi' ciphers, Mr. Carson. They can't take a 'and with us, of course, but they're always glad to give me a bit of 'elp.

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And if we don't act quick, that poor girl is dead and damned, just like that."

"Are you serious?" Carson's gray eyes were startled.

"Yes, sir; serious is the word, as the old gent said when 'e kissed the 'ousemaid. Sir Basil is the worst scoundrel in Europe, and 'is ruddy friends are the same."

"But he's a famous man, John!"

JOHN SOLOMON

exclaimed Carson. "And look at that newspaper—look at the list of people on the yacht! World-famous musicians, nobility—"

"All bluff, just like that." Solomon swept his pipe in the air. "What makes it bad is that Sir Basil knows she 'as asked me for 'elp. Lucky 'e don't know me by sight. If I ain't mistook, 'is errand in London now is to try and get a line on me."

"Can he do it?"

Solomon nodded. "There ain't much 'e can't do, sir. Money, brains, and no scruples whatever; that's 'im. What 'e goes after, 'e gets; that's 'is boast. You see, sir, she was afraid of it. A month ago she asks me for 'elp. I 'ad known 'er father, the last Duke, and I 'ave some of 'er money now, taking care of it for 'er, so to speak. I told 'er to let me know when the time come. Poor girl, she got off word too late."

Carson was by this time really alarmed by Solomon's reference to the Duchess.

"What kind of trouble is she in?"

"Dang it, we can't talk 'ere," said the other irritably. "I don't like these 'ere questions. Come along; we'll take a cab 'ome, sir. We can't do nothing until we find what's in that 'ere message from Calais, anyhow. And I'll 'ave to get some men to work down along the docks. If that 'ere yacht don't come no farther up the river than Tilbury or Greenhithe we'll 'ave our work cut out for us."

Paying for their untouched drinks, they left the place and in the Strand caught a cruising taxicab, whose driver went wild with enthusiasm at receiving an address in Limehouse—a long run for a city job.

ONCE settled in the cab, Solomon relapsed into a brown study, apparently without the slightest intention of doing any talking.

"All right." Carson caught up the speaking tube. "I'm getting out. I took the job, but I'm not taking any job where I don't know what's going on. You and your duchess can go to thunder, for all of me. I'd probably fall in love with her anyhow, from her looks—I never did see a girl who was so attractive. So long. Get somebody else."

And he ordered the driver to pull in at the curb.

Solomon woke up. "Dang it, 'ave you gone off your 'ead?" he cried out in some agitation.

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"No," said Carson. "You don't seem to want to tell me what's wrong with her—"

"Dang it, I don't know!" said Solomon earnestly.

Carson sniffed. "You don't know? And you're holding a lodge of sorrow over her, calling her dead and damned and so forth? Don't give me any such nonsense."

"That is the God's truth, sir!" Solomon exclaimed. "I don't know, just like that. All I know is it's something 'orrible. The woman said so when she called me up last night."

"What woman?" snapped Carson.

"Why, 'er personal maid, sir. I sent me men to fetch 'er. She 'ad come from Naples by air to find me. That's why I told you then we 'ad to jump. I ain't talked with 'er yet. She's 'ad a collapse. She's in my 'ouse now, I 'opes, and we'll 'ave a talk with 'er."

Carson told the chauffeur to drive on. Then he sank down and regarded Solomon with a grim expression.

"And you've gone clear off the handle, turned pickpocket, and scurried around like a chicken with its head off—all on account of something you don't know about?"

"Yes, sir," said Solomon; but his placid blue eyes twinkled slightly. "I 'ave me own way of doing things, Mr. Carson."

"So I'm learning," Carson rejoined tartly. "Under the circumstances, any sane person, it seems to me, would call the police to act. Why not drag in Scotland Yard?"

"So I did, sir, so I did, and a werry black eye was all I got for me pains," said Solomon. With a wheezy sigh, he produced a sheaf of telegrams. "Look 'ere. I 'ad the Yard get in touch wi' the French police at Calais—but see for yourself, sir."

These telegrams, none of them more than three hours old, told their own story. John Solomon was right. So far as Scotland Yard was concerned, he had received a very black eye indeed. For, acting upon his plea, the Yard had caused the French police to board Sir Basil's yacht at Calais that same morning.

They had seen the Duchess of Furstein. And, with great indignation, she had resented their importunity, scoffed at the idea of anything wrong, sent them about their business. The resultant comments to John Solomon from the Yard were polite but frigid.

Carson whistled. "Why, John, this knocks all your cock and bull story plumb in the head."

"Yes, sir," said the other morosely. "That's what Scotland Yard says, sir."

"And Scotland Yard is right about it."

Under his breath John Solomon muttered something about Scotland Yard that was neither frigid nor polite.

CHAPTER II.

JOURNALIST CARSON.

CARSON turned abruptly to his companion.

"John, didn't you say that woman should be at your house by now? Well, I telephoned an hour ago, when I got your note. No one answered."

Solomon gave him a startled look, then caught up the speaking tube and ordered the driver to head in at the curb and wait. They were in a dingy street of Stepney.

"Dang it, I might 'ave knowed it! I've 'ad a dozen things on me mind;

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I'm a-getting old and no mistake," he muttered. Then he turned and laid his hand on Carson's knee, and spoke earnestly.

"I'll 'ave to move werry fast, sir. Mr. Carson, it ain't often as I goes outside the law, so to speak, but in this 'ere case it's got to be done. You see for yourself what Scotland Yard 'as to say about it. I don't pretend to know what 'appened at Calais, or why she turned off them French police like that—"

"Are you going ahead with this thing?" demanded Carson, frowning.

"Yes, sir, I am, just like that. And we'll 'ave the law dead against us; and if so be as we slip up, there's no 'elp for it as I can see. English law ain't to be sneezed at, sir."

Carson nodded. Pull or no pull, if the laws of England nipped John Solomon, he would be nipped. That's all there was to it.

"Then we mustn't slip up, John."

"You ain't backing out?"

"Not much. I believe with the Yard that you're on a false trail, and this whole thing is a lot of hooey. It's been proven by what happened at Calais. But at the same time, John, if you said black was white I'd put my money on your say-so. Only," and Carson paused, thinking of that girl's picture, "I want to know a few things."

"All right, all right, dang it! There's a mortal lot I want to know too." Solomon opened the cab door and prepared to descend. "I'm a-getting out 'ere, sir. If I ain't mistook, I've got work to do in a 'urry. You take this 'ere cab and go to the old 'arbor-master's 'ouse. Do you know it?"

"Never heard of it."

"The 'arbor-master 'as brand new offices now in Trinity Square, but this 'ere is the old Port o' London 'eadquarters. You can still get permits there. I'll telephone about it from that corner pub yonder. Get general permits to enter the docks, for you and me both. When you get them passes, come back to me shop, sir, and watch your step. There's mortal bad deviltry afoot, but I'll know more about it when you show up. Dang it! If they've gone and murdered that poor woman—"

"Murdered her? The duchess?"

"No; 'er maid. They'd want to shut 'er mouth. I should 'ave gone after 'er meself instead o' sending them men o' mine, but I've been busy. Well, sir, good luck, and don't talk to no strangers."

With this apparently jocose admonition, Solomon got out and slammed the door. He told the driver to take Carson to the house of the harbor-master, and stamped away.

The cab meandered on toward the Thames, through the narrow lanes of Limehouse. It halted abruptly. Carson got out and paid off the driver. Then he lit a cigarette and stood looking around. No need to ask his way here.

He was plunged suddenly into a new world, here in the ancient heart of Limehouse. He had supposed vaguely that the enormous London docks, the greatest port in the world, were something worth seeing; he had yet to learn the truth of that. But here, in a backwater of the river life, was the central authority of all this vast port system—the house of the harbor-master of the port of London.

THE huge letters on the curved front of the house told him so. Its wide verandas overlooked the water, a flag flapped gayly above in the dim morning sunlight. All about were crowded old tottering houses half fall-

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ing toward the ugly graveled beach, warehouses, boat sheds, barges half built, in a confused mass.

Carson paused, taking in the wide sweep of the river. Here, unexpectedly, he had a glimpse of what London docks really meant, for the tide was right and the shipping was all in motion.

The river ran between huge, high banks. A little before, there had been no sign of any docks, but now the enormous gates were swinging, up and down the stream, like unguessed doors opening on fairyland. There behind the walls, there among the houses and factories and warehouses, lay London docks, unseen and unguessed of any who passed by.

Turning into the pleasant building, Carson found few people about; it was still a bit early in the morning. He inquired his way, and presently found himself seated in a most attractive office where a coal fire burned in the grate, and a grizzled man wrote out the passes. Yes, Mr. Solomon had telephoned about them. Unusual, of course, but in his case quite all right.

With the passes in his pocket, Carson emerged again into the dirty, unkempt streets of Limehouse, heading for the shop which served John Solomon there as a blind for his own house behind.

He turned into Reach Road at last, a street of strange foreign peoples, from Hindus to Chinese, ugly grog shops, slatternly rooming houses. Ahead of him loomed his dingy and unwashed destination, a shop over whose door was the sign of John Solomon, chandler.

As Carson approached, this door opened and a man came out. Amazed as he was, Carson instantly checked his pace and halted, ostensibly to light a cigarette. For this man was the same whose pocket Solomon had picked—Sir Basil Lohancs, cane, silk topper and all.

He turned and surveyed the dingy shop with a puzzled frown. A frowzy fellow in the cap and coat of a coster slouched across the street and addressed him, evidently for a match. Sir Basil handed him one. Carson, watching, fancied that a few words passed between them. Then Sir Basil turned away and strode briskly toward Carson, who had now become interested in the contents of a shop window.

Sir Basil halted abruptly.

"Look here, my man," he exclaimed to Carson, "I wonder if you can tell me anything about the man who keeps that shop yonder—"

His words died, as Carson turned. A sudden light blazed in his dark, powerful eyes.

"Ah!" he said. "I remember you. Yes; you were the man outside that tobacco shop. Following me, are you?"

For an instant Carson was utterly astounded. He was sharply wakened to the truth of Solomon's words about this man.

Sir Basil had seen him for a moment only, apparently had paid no heed to him there outside the tobacco shop; yet now, at a glance, knew him again. Was this why Solomon had so hastily sent him to the pub in Chancery Lane? All this flashed through his head, even as he smiled, attempting no evasion.

"Yes, I don't mind admitting it," he rejoined easily. "Is it any crime to follow you?"

"It's an impertinence at least," said Sir Basil. "And you appear to be quite brazen about it. You know my name?"

"My dear Sir Basil, you're an important man in the world, and follow-

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ing important men is my business," said Carson affably. Long ago he had learned that the best offense to any attack is the unexpected. His easy assurance took the older man aback.

He appraised Carson with one swift glance.

"I fail to follow you, sir," he said crisply.

Carson chuckled.

"No pun intended, I trust? Come, come, Sir Basil! Sorry I haven't a card. Carson is the name; Amalgamated Press. You'll not be too hard on me, I hope? To tell the truth, I recognized you in the Strand, and followed you here. I'd been on the lookout for you, of course. We want to get a story about this yacht of yours—and then there's this affair of the Strand this morning. Your pocket was picked, I believe?

"Perhaps you'll do me the honor to give me a few moments. I'm really most anxious to get an interview with one of your guests aboard the yacht, the Duchess Alixe. You saw her picture in the *Post* this morning, perhaps? Surely you have no antagonism toward the press—"

AS he rattled all this off with glib tongue, Carson watched the effect of his words, and was delighted. The angry tension in the other man's face relaxed. Here all Sir Basil's questions and suspicions were answered in a very natural and affable manner, even before he had any chance to voice them.

"Hm! Amalgamated Press, eh? I've a notion to report your impudence to your general manager, Rothstein."

Carson grinned. "Good! That'll give me a step up. Seriously, Sir Basil, I had no intention of annoying you. I'd be only too glad if you'd give us a short statement in regard to present industrial conditions on the Continent, and arrange an interview for me with the Duchess. If you want nothing said about this affair in the Strand, of course I'll comply with your desires."

The dark, powerful features cleared. "Very good. Carson, I think, is the name? Come to my rooms at the Ritz this afternoon about three. I'll have the statement for you, and shall see what can be done about the interview. And now, perhaps, I may be permitted to go on my way alone?"

"By all means; and thank you," said Carson, laughing.

With a nod Sir Basil strode away down Reach Road, turned the next corner, and was gone.

Hesitating, Carson glanced about for the coster, but there was no sign of that frowzy individual anywhere. After all, he might have been mistaken, probably had been mistaken, in imagining anything between that man and Sir Basil; the fellow might have been begging for money as well as for a light.

None the less, he passed by Solomon's shop, looked in the windows beyond, then came back and entered the dingy place. A bell tinkled as he stepped in. All about was a litter of cable, anchors, ship's paint and other supplies. A slender, darkish young man approached; this was Mahmud, who kept the shop.

"Good day, Mr. Carson. Go right on through; you know the way."

With a nod, Carson threaded a path through the jungle of stuff and gained a door at the rear. This admitted him to a dilapidated little office; a door beyond stood open, and Carson found himself in John Solomon's actual office.

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It was empty.

Before the desk was a swivel chair, on the desk was Solomon's old clay pipe and a new plug of black tobacco. There was no apparent opening in the room except the one door by which Carson had entered; he was not sure just where the other door lay, behind the magnificence that hid the walls.

In this one room were treasures to make a collector's mouth water. On the floor was a sixteenth century Ispahan carpet, perfect and glorious. The walls were entirely overlaid by rare Chinese tapestries of woven silk. Against these curtains, on tables, on the desk, everywhere in the room, were weapons, jades, vases, jewels of every description, all oriental and all priceless.

DUCHESS FURSTEIN

One of the tapestries was waved aside. A door opened, and Solomon came into the room.

"Oh, 'ello!" he exclaimed warmly. "So you 'ad a chat with 'im, sir?"

"Eh?" Carson started. "How the devil did you know that?"

Solomon chuckled wheezily, took his seat at the desk, and began to whittle tobacco from the plug into his hand.

"I've been keepin' me eye on the street, so to speak, Mr. Carson. It pays to keep your eyes open, as the old gent said when 'e kissed the 'ousemaid. A werry sharp man, that 'ere Sir Basil. Think of 'im a-following me 'ere, quick as that!

"But 'e was a-running down John Solomon, and 'e run 'im down. Bless 'is black 'eart, 'e don't know yet as I'm Solomon. What did 'e have to say, sir?"

Carson recounted the conversation. Solomon stuffed his clay pipe, puffed it alight, tipped his chair back, and fastened his mild blue eyes steadily on Carson.

"And I s'pose you think, sir, as 'ow you fooled 'im completely."

"Naturally. I've an appointment for this afternoon at the Ritz—"

"And I went and told you once as 'ow 'e ain't stopping at the Ritz, nor Brown's, nor nowheres else, but the Cecil. Recognized your face, 'e did. This werry blessed minute, what's 'e doing? Looking of you up. Finding there ain't no Carson with the Amalgamated Press. Well, did you get them 'ere passes?"

"Yes." Carson laid them on the desk. Solomon seized and pocketed them. "By the way, Sir Basil was in your shop, wasn't he?"

"And 'e didn't get no satisfaction out o' Mahmud."

"When he came out, a man who looked like a coster asked him for a light, came from across the street. I thought some words passed; but after Sir Basil was gone, there was no sign of the coster."

"That 'ere chap," said Solomon complacently, "'as been a-watching of the shop for the past 'our. Werry good, Mr. Carson; you're a-coming on. You

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stay with me long enough and you'll know a lot, as the old gent said when 'e 'ired the pretty 'ouse-keeper. That 'ere coster ain't gone away. 'E seen you come in. No use thinking Sir Basil ain't on to you now. Ah! Dang it, now we're a-going to get somewhere!"

THE telephone on the desk had rung sharply. Solomon answered. A faint hint of excitement came into his voice. He seized a pencil and began jotting down notes.

"Thank you werry much, sir. What's that? Yes, indeed, I'll keep me 'ands out of 'is affairs; a werry bad customer 'e is."

He hung up, and chuckled wheezily.

"Warned me against Sir Basil, they did."

"Who did?"

"The Foreign Office, sir. This 'ere is the decoded message."

Carson seized the sheet of paper thrust at him, examined it hastily. Somewhat to his disappointment, it turned out to be very prosaic:

STEAM STEERING GEAR IN URGENT NEED OVERHAUL AND REPAIRS REQUIRING AT LEAST A DAY. ARRANGE TO BE DONE LONDON OR CANNOT ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY.
DEVRIES, MASTER.

"Eh?" Carson glanced up. "Just what does this mean?"

"What it says, just like that, sir. Devries is the cap'n of the yacht. I'll 'ear any minute now just where the *Nureddin* will be docked; that's 'er name."

Carson laid down the paper.

"Well, we're doing a lot of shifting all over the ring," he said, irritated, "and still I don't know any more about the whole thing than I did."

"You're a-going to learn, sir, and so am I, in a werry few minutes," Solomon rejoined, placidly puffing at his pipe. "And then we're a-going to get out of 'ere werry fast. It ain't 'ealthy. That 'ere Sir Basil 'as got on me nerves, and werry sorry I am to say it. That 'ere man don't stick at nothing."

"Nonsense. Are you trying to tell me that a man of his caliber, his wealth and standing, is an arrant scoundrel?"

Solomon grunted. "Worse'n that, 'e is. And 'ow did 'e get 'is wealth, except by bein' a scoundrel? But right now, Sir Basil 'as a mortal lot of influence and power, so watch out. Yes, we'll 'ave to move fast."

Again the telephone rang. Solomon spoke, listened, and hung up with a grunt.

"Coming into the dock now, she is. Newbegin Overhaul Docks, right close to the old East India docks—and not so far away from 'ere, neither. Oh, 'ello!"

The tapestries swung aside. In the opening appeared, to the astonishment of Carson, an elderly man clad in the white apron of a surgeon, Solomon glanced up.

"Well?"

"She can't last long," and the other shook his head. "I've injected adrenalin; if you want a word with her, come along. She'll probably be able to talk in five minutes or so."

"Mr. Carson, this is Sir 'Enry Macnaughton of Harley Street," said Solomon, laying his pipe aside and rising. "Werry good of 'im it is to give us a 'and with this 'ere poor female—"

"What!" Carson remembered suddenly. "You mean the woman you spoke about? The maid of Duchess Alixe? Is she here, then?"

"Yes, sir, me men got 'er 'ere after all, but she's in a werry bad way indeed, 'cause why, somebody else got to 'er afore us."

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The famous Harley Street surgeon swept Carson a keen glance, and a nod.

"Poison," he said curtly. "Better come along. My assistant has her in charge."

Carson rose and accompanied them, with a sickish feeling.

CHAPTER III.

CAUGHT BEYOND ESCAPE.

"WHO got ahead of you? Sir Basil?" muttered Carson, as he passed with Solomon into a corridor that led to the house proper. The pudgy little man nodded gloomily.

"Yes, sir. That 'ere man 'as agents and spies all over. Look what 'appened wi' that poor woman! In there, she is. That's 'er 'usband with 'er."

They paused in a doorway. The surgeon went on to speak with his assistant at the bedside. The woman lying there, a woman of forty, was still unconscious. Standing watching her, eyes unmoving, features rigid, was a grotesque little dried-up man, not over five feet six, shrunken and wizened, but with immense sweeping mustaches. He looked like a gnome dressed in street clothes. He was the head gardener of the duchess, his wife was her maid.

As Solomon murmured in the ear of Carson, upon finding their mistress gone, the pair had gone to Naples, then to London by air. Devoted to their mistress, their sole hope was to find Solomon, whom Duchess Alixe had mentioned more than once to her maid. Reaching here the previous evening by air, they had telephoned him. A car had picked them up at Croydon airport, presumably sent by Solomon, but had taken them to a cheap Italian boarding house where they were told to wait for him.

When Solomon's men finally ran them down, in the early morning hours, the woman had been poisoned, was unable to talk. Solomon imparted all this in a few brief words, caught the attention of the grotesque fellow, whose name was Merlin, and beckoned. The man approached the doorway and Solomon addressed him in very fair Italian.

"Do you know what your mistress feared?"

"No, *signor*. My wife did not tell me. It was something about Sir Basil Lohancs. And at that boarding house last night, I heard his name mentioned." A flash of ferocity came into the shriveled, grotesque face. The big mustaches quivered. "He has done this, he has done it! If I can find him—"

"Never mind." Solomon brushed him aside. The surgeon was beckoning. They all three crossed to the bed. The woman had just opened her eyes; Merlin sank on his knees and caught her hand, with a passionate cry, but she stared up at the others.

"Signor—Signor Solomon!"

"Tell me," said Solomon. "What is wrong?"

"The yacht!" cried out the woman, her pallid face flashing into life. "They have a doctor aboard. Vecchini, the poisoner, who escaped from prison. She will die, I tell you—she will die—"

A pitiful whimpering cry of pain was wrenched from her, she quivered spasmodically, and then she relaxed. Her eyes closed. MacNaughton caught up her wrist. A cry broke from Merlin, a storm of sobs as he realized that she was dead. And her story remained untold.

"A serious matter, Solomon," said the surgeon slowly. "My report, you know—"

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"All right. Get 'old of Inspector David o' Scotland Yard," said Solomon promptly. "You might take this chap Merlin there. Let 'im tell 'is story, then send 'im back 'ere. I'll take care of 'im. Inspector David can 'andle the matter."

Carson went back to the office, frowning, agitated by what he had just witnessed. Solomon presently appeared and sat down to the telephone. He put through a number of calls. Then, with a wheezy sigh, he swung his chair around to face Carson.

"Confound it!" said Carson, meeting the mild blue eyes. "Do you realize that woman might simply have died of ptomaine poisoning?"

"That's what Sir 'Enry says," Solomon admitted, holding a match to his pipe. "Only an autopsy can tell for sure. So I expect as 'ow Scotland Yard ain't a-going to make werry much of the matter, sir."

"And still you've nothing to go on but some hearsay talk. Why, it's absurd, sir."

"That 'ere woman died tryin' to save 'er mistress, Mr. Carson."

The American drew a deep breath.

"All right. I'll see it through with you. As for Duchess Alixe—"

"She's aboard that 'ere yacht, sir," said Solomon, eyeing him steadily. "The master, Devries, is English; the crew is French and Italian. And she's a-going to be killed if we don't 'elp 'er. Do you understand?"

"Certainly, to some extent; but what I understand simply can't be credited," Carson rejoined bluntly. "You say that Sir Basil had this poor woman poisoned. She tells us that the duchess is in the hands of some rascals who intend to drug her, poison her, kill her. Do you expect me to believe that a man of Sir Basil's position and standing would be back of such nonsensical business?"

Solomon appeared irritated.

"It ain't nonsensical," he said sharply. "As for standing, Sir Basil ain't got none, so to speak. Put out o' the Royal Yacht Club last year, 'e was, for crooked work. Crazy about jewels, 'e is, fair mad about 'em, sir. It's the main thing in 'is life. Maybe you know 'ow a man like 'im will go after jewels?"

Carson nodded. So this was it! Such a consuming passion, in such a man, would explain many things. He thought again of that dark, powerful face, and realized that this man might indeed stop at nothing.

"What's that got to do with the Duchess of Furstein?" he demanded.

"DIDN'T you read that 'ere newspaper this morning? She 'as the Furstein emeralds, the greatest lot o' green stones in the world. She 'as plenty o' money; no reason for 'er to sell them emeralds. To get 'em, Sir Basil would commit murder a 'undred times over, sir. Murder don't mean nothing to 'im."

"But to murder a girl, a lovely creature like this duchess—"

"That's 'is way. Women don't mean much to 'im, sir. That 'ere man 'as women all over Europe; buys 'em like 'e does jewels, but 'e don't keep 'em. An animal, Mr. Carson, as 'as shoved 'is bloody way to the top of the 'eap. Jewels is 'is one great passion, so to speak."

"But," said Carson slowly, "she must have known what sort of a man he is. How did he get her aboard his yacht? Is she kidnaped?"

"More or less, I expect." Solomon shook his head. "But that don't matter. She's there, and your job is to

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get aboard and see 'er, and werry sharp about it. I 'ave me own plans for comin' aboard meself, and I'll get there later on."

"But what'll I do, providing I do get on the yacht?"

Solomon regarded him blankly. "I ain't got the faintest notion, sir. We can't tell a blessed thing till we see 'er. But I 'ave a letter asking me to 'elp 'er, and that letter may save our necks if we slip up. You see, I knew 'er father well, and was agent for 'im. We'll 'ave to use our 'eads, just like that. And maybe more than out 'eads, too."

Pulling at a drawer of his desk, Solomon took out a small Browning and passed it over. Carson pocketed the weapon and frowned slightly.

"No plan, you say? Do you realize how impossible it is for anyone to get aboard such a craft as that, guarded as she must be at every point?"

"There ain't nothing impossible, sir, if so be as you 'ave a 'ead," said Solomon. At this moment the shop door swung open and Mahmud appeared.

"Effendi, a man is here by your command—"

"Show 'im in, dang it!" ordered Solomon rather testily.

A moment later, into the room came a middle-aged man who had the air and dress of a shop foreman. He nodded to Solomon.

"Well, sir, I got here as quick as possible. The works are busy this morning."

"This 'ere is me friend Mr. Carson," said Solomon. "Carson, this is Don McCabe, general manager of the Newbegin works. Me and 'im 'ave knowed each other for a long time."

McCabe nodded to Carson. "A matter of fifteen years, Mr. Solomon."

"Werry good. That 'ere yacht *Nureddin* is a-coming into your docks on the tide."

"Yes; the owner called me on the telephone about her. Her steam steering gear needs an overhaul, I believe."

"Now, McCabe, you listen sharp," said Solomon. "There's a werry bad gang aboard that 'ere yacht, but that ain't your business. I want you to take Mr. Carson along with you, put dungarees on 'im, and get 'im aboard that yacht. Make your inspection, and report it'll take the best part o' four days to fix up that 'ere gear. And if so be as Mr. Carson loses 'imself aboard, you pay no attention."

McCabe whistled softly. "It's a good thing I know you to be no crook, Mr. Solomon! But I can't do such a thing as this. In the first place, the dock police are very strict, and I couldn't get Mr. Carson into the docks themselves without a pass—"

"We 'ave one," and Solomon produced the pass in question, handing it to Carson.

McCabe shook his head firmly. "Even so, it can't be done. If any questions were asked, and it looks to me as though they might be asked, it's as much as my job is worth."

"Werry good, McCabe," said Solomon placidly, and opened one of the desk drawers. He took out two large, fat envelopes, and handed one of them to the visitor.

"There's a thousand quid in twenty-pound notes. This 'ere is another thousand, to be yours after the work's done. Is it worth risking your job for or not?"

The man swallowed hard, peered into the envelope, and his eyes bulged. Five thousand dollars there in his hand, and as much more to be earned; it was next to incredible.

"You're damned right it is," he re-

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plied hoarsely. "But mind, if they know just what's wrong wi' the gear and that it won't take so long—"

"Then make something else wrong," said Solomon, with a chuckle. He swung back to the desk, and from another drawer produced a small box, which he handed Carson. "Better put on that 'ere false mustache, sir. Then you and 'im slip out the back way. It ain't far to the works from 'ere. Are you satisfied now, Mr. Carson?"

"More or less." Carson smiled

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slightly. "Do you know everybody in London, John?"

"Well, sir, I 'ave a pretty fair acquaintance," and Solomon nodded, a twinkle in his blue eyes. "It ain't knowing people as counts; it's 'aving them know you. Eh, McCabe?"

"Right you are, sir," affirmed the latter.

PRESENTLY Carson found himself striding briskly beside McCabe up India Dock Road; and after that, things moved swiftly, with an admirable precision. McCabe was an efficient man.

As by magic, the vast expanses of the docks were open to them, and they plunged into a world unsuspected from the river or from the city, a world walled in and girdled about with precaution. Great basins for anchorage, unending wharfs, godowns, warehouses, shops, drydocks, a strident clangor of life in the heart of London yet utterly alien to it.

Wearing dungarees, a cap, his false mustache, Carson carried a kit of tools and followed McCabe to where a slim white shape was warping in beside an open wharf. As soon as the plank was down and the gangway rigged, McCabe strode aboard. The first officer halted them, heard McCabe's business, and turned to a seaman at his side.

"Take them to the bridge," he ordered in French. Carson noted that the men around were apparently Latins.

McCabe followed the seaman closely; Carson lagged, as they headed forward. He would never get another chance like the present moment, he knew. Men were passing and repassing, the decks were in confusion, a hundred things were being done. On the after deck, Carson had glimpsed three men in steamer chairs, watching the docks and being served by a steward in trim uniform.

An open door, a glimpse of steel gratings, of lower darkness—the engineroom hatch. Carson quietly slipped into the opening, waited a moment.

He peered out. McCabe and the guide had disappeared. No one was in sight hereabout. A few seconds later, Carson was back aft at another door. A passage; the saloon lounge opened before him, empty. A stairway at the forward end; he took a

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chance, descended. Ah! The cabins, spick and span, luxurious.

Carson hesitated, alert, poised. Which way? Any port of refuge, temporarily, would do. Down the passage he observed two large vases of flowers, set outside a door. The quarters of the duchess, no doubt. He approached, came to a side passage—suddenly ducked into it. The door ahead had opened. A woman emerged, humming a light tune. She came past the passage where Carson stood immobile against a wall. He had a glimpse of her face, framed in yellow hair; a young, impetuous, crafty face. The uniform of some sort, perhaps that of a maid. Then she was gone, without seeing him.

A man's voice was uplifted, close by. Carson started, glanced about. A door was almost at his back. He tried it, looked into the empty cabins, stepped in and closed the door. With a breath of relief, he set down his tool kit.

Here were two luxurious cabins, one a lounge, in which he was, the other with two brass beds. Occupied? No, thank heaven! The closets were empty, no personal effects in sight. A door in the bedroom wall caught his eye. He calculated swiftly; this door must communicate with the adjoining suite.

Excellent! His pulses leaped. Then he had the duchess within reach!

He quickly got out of his dungarees, beneath which were his own clothes, hung them in the closet, put the kit of tools with them. The false mustache, he left. The cap went into the closet. He had half-closed the door to the outer lounge cabin. He now approached that in the wall, tried it softly. It was locked; but the key was in the lock. He turned it—and hesitated. The full enormity of his act came sharply into his mind.

It was noon and past. At an early hour of this same morning, the duchess had angrily repelled the French police. If she did the same thing now, Carson very well knew he would suffer. After all, it looked as though Solomon were on a wild goose chase.

With a shrug, he tried the door, opened it a bare crack, peered into the cabin beyond. Then he was thankful he had made no sound. Back to the door, a man was standing there speaking, not three feet away. Carson, as he softly closed the door again, caught the words.

"—regret, your highness, that I must ask you not to leave this cabin for the present. You are on the side of the ship away from shore; you cannot, therefore, communicate with anyone, and such efforts on your part would only force me to take unpleasant steps."

"But this is intolerable!" cried a high, clear voice, a woman's voice. Carson closed the door. He glanced over his shoulder, startled. He was caught beyond escape.

Men were coming into the adjoining cabin, the lounge by which he had entered this suite.

CHAPTER IV.

"I SUSPECT NOTHING!"

FOR an instant he stood petrified.

"This will do very well," said a man's voice in French. "It is unoccupied."

Steps sounded in the adjacent cabin, chairs were moved about. Carson caught the pistol from his pocket. If they came on into this cabin, he was lost.

Yet through his brain flashed, in exultation, the brief dialogue he had

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just overheard ere the door closed. So it was all true, all of it! That was her suite. She was a prisoner there. Solomon had been right!

"Well, why the secrecy?" came the impatient question from the outer cabin. The door was ajar between; every word reached Carson clearly. "Why not talk on deck, Vecchini?"

A man laughed, curtly. "With that steward around? Nonsense. Sir Basil will be aboard in an hour or less. What explanation am I going to give him?"

"Tell him the truth."

"Bah! Here, give me one of your cigarettes."

Carson relaxed, put the pistol out of sight. They were not coming in here, then. And this must be the Italian doctor mentioned by the dying woman.

"Now, Dufour, listen to me," went on Vecchini. "Excuses do not go with Sir Basil. We had our orders. You became soft-hearted; so, I admit, did I. To drug that beautiful creature, that charming specimen of womanhood, before reaching England—well, I have put off doing it. I have listened to you."

"It seemed absurd, a monstrous thing," returned Dufour, evidently a Frenchman, in a gloomy voice. "She could not escape; why fill that glorious body with drugs, why ruin one of the most perfect women imaginable with morphia and render her an insensate thing?"

"Because those were our orders. That was why we came aboard here, received our money."

"What can he do?"

"Kill us, you fool. Don't you know he has no heart, no soul, except for those damned glittering stones? They have robbed him of all human emotion."

The other grunted. "Suppose we open a port in the next cabin. It's close in here—"

Carson thought of the closet—it was across the room. A chair scraped. Another moment and one of them would be in here. His hand, still on the knob of the door, turned it. Again he opened it slightly. Silence now, except for a stifled sob.

Swiftly, he chanced everything, opened the door, passed through, closed the door again. Then he turned.

There was a startled gasp. One other person in the cabin; a woman, sitting at the table, her eyes widening upon him. The duchess herself—no mistaking that face, the face of a lovely girl, but tenfold more lovely than the newspaper likeness. A door stood open behind her, the passage to a bedroom cabin.

With one swift gesture of reassurance to her, Carson stepped swiftly to this door and closed it. Almost at once, a sharp rap came on the panel. A woman's voice sounded, calling.

"Madame desires something?"

Carson made a despairing gesture, but the woman at the table understood. She lifted her voice in reply. Her distended, startled eyes did not leave the intruder.

"Nothing. Leave me alone."

With quick relief, Carson turned, approached her, and smiled.

"My name is Carson, madame; I have come from John Solomon. Thanks—you saved the day splendidly, just now; I was nearly caught. You speak English, I think?"

"Naturally, since my mother was English. Oh, I cannot believe it!" she broke out abruptly. "Where is Mr. Solomon? Here?"

Carson shrugged. "I don't know where he is. He sent me aboard here to see you if possible. Why on earth

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did you send the French police packing this morning?"

"The French police?" Astonishment, perplexity, filled her features. "But, my friend, I don't know what you mean, I assure you—"

"We had the French police come aboard this yacht at Calais, early this morning. You saw them, stated emphatically there was nothing wrong, that you wished no interference."

She gazed at him steadily for a moment, then her eyes widened. "Oh!" she said slowly. "So that was it! That maid, Therese—yes, I see now. She came in very early and took one of my gowns, my coats—oh, and I remember there were voices outside. The police, eh? Then she saw them, pretended to be me. Yes, she could have done that."

Carson, startled, saw that she had hit it. The yellow-haired woman he had glimpsed must be this Therese. Probably the Calais police had no picture of the duchess and accepted as true whatever was told them.

"Clever crowd you have aboard here," said Carver. "Well, if you want help, I'm here. Do you want to get away?"

"Do I want—oh, if you only knew!" she exclaimed. "This terrible ship, these unspeakable men! And Sir Basil the worst of them all—"

"He'll be along soon," Carson said. "We've no time to lose. If they catch me aboard here, I'm sunk. Wait; what's that?"

A noise at the door, a woman's voice. Therese, no doubt.

CARSON saw an open closet door. He darted to it, stepped in, made a gesture of cheerful reassurance to the duchess, and drew the door shut.

He could hear nothing.

Splendid girl! No fuss; yet she had been crying when he entered. Sharp as a whip, too. She had seen the explanation of that French police blunder in a flash. No wonder Sir Basil had wanted her safely drugged before the yacht reached England.

Suddenly the door swung open. She stood there, eager, alert, poised for action.

"All right, Mr. — what is the name? Carson, yes. They've gone. I've locked the door. What am I to do? How can we leave, get ashore, anywhere?"

Carson, emerging, saw the table set for luncheon with a glitter of silver and glass. He glanced at the cabin ports. Over the outside of each one was a stout iron bar, effectually banishing any thought of escape by that means. Then he recollected the adjoining suite, and his eyes lit up.

"We've no time to fool around," he said rapidly. "I can jump overboard —looks like the only way. You can't. If you stay here while I make my getaway and bring the police—"

"Wait!" she exclaimed sharply, coming close to him, speaking tensely but not loud. "You don't understand. Sir Basil brought me to hear the great pianist, Ludovics, play. It was a lie. He was not aboard at all. I drank some water; it was drugged. I know little of what happened. I was bewildered, stupefied, helpless. They told me to sign papers, give up my emeralds, and I did everything they asked. It was like an evil, monstrous dream. Long before, I had been given warnings that people were after my emeralds. That was why I tried to get word to Mr. Solomon."

"Well, you're all right now," said Carson, with more assurance than he felt.

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"But I cannot stay here and let you go," she went on, desperation in her eyes. "I am in terror of that man, Sir Basil; no, no, we must both go ashore at any cost!"

"All right," said Carson briskly. "I suppose the officers are in on the game?"

"The captain, of course. Probably the others. I don't know what they think would happen here in London—"

"Hold on." Carson swung around and went quickly to the door of the adjoining suite. He gripped the knob, opened it softly. The two men were still there. From the cabin beyond he caught the voice of Vecchini, shrill and petulant.

"It's true we were soft about her; but we'd better wake up. Why did Sir Basil leave us at Gibraltar and come on here alone? I don't like it. That marriage ceremony should have ended the whole business! It's absurd to use drugs on a lovely creature like—"

"You've been drinking too much, Vecchini," came the voice of the Frenchman.

Carson, despite his nervous tension, could not help listening for more. A glance showed him that the girl had caught the words and was listening, sudden wild alarm in her face. Dufour went on speaking.

"Give up the liquor, you fool. You're a fine one to shrink from drugging a girl, just because she's pretty."

"Speak for yourself," growled Vecchini sulkily. "You started it. We'd better do it before he comes aboard. I tell you, I'm afraid of him!"

Carson could picture the Italian—weak, criminal, yet so impressed by the beauty and fineness of this girl as to be unable to complete his infernal work. But now, with Sir Basil at hand, swift terror had risen in him.

"Bah! Be sensible," Dufour returned. "She's his wife. The law can't touch him or us either. You should know that in England a man can beat his wife, do what he likes; she's his property. All Englishmen are brutes. Everything was made safe by that ceremony. Even if she makes a fuss later, who'd believe her? You know he came on here to present the proofs of the marriage and the receipts she signed, and get the jewels that are here in London. Come along on deck. Let's find how long these repairs will keep us here."

A SCRAPE of chairs, the slam of the outer cabin door. Carson, feeling as though a cold hand had gripped his neck, turned and looked at the Duchess Alixe. She was white as death. Despite the urgency of their case, despite the peril on every side, what he had just heard overbore everything else in Carson's mind.

"Is it true, what they said?"

"I don't know, I don't know," she said in a low, dead voice. "It was all a trap, of course. Everything is so confused in my mind—"

"Were any of your jewels here in London?"

"Yes. Some of the unset emeralds were being made into a necklace. Other settings were being repaired."

"Good Lord! I begin to see light," muttered Carson. "What about the marriage they mentioned? Was there a marriage?"

She flinched.

"Yes — there was something — I thought I had dreamed it! Therese laughed at me when I spoke of it. Oh, I tell you I don't know what happened, I wasn't myself at all. Marriage! If it—if it were not a dream—"

She lost her poise, broke into almost

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incoherent phrases, then shrank back in her chair and was silent, motionless. Suddenly anger rose in her eyes, color in her cheeks.

"He would dare—they would dare—do such a thing!" she broke out.

"Listen, young lady; keep your head. You need it," exclaimed Carson. "How much are those emeralds of yours worth, in cash?"

"I don't know. A million—two million, I think."

"What, francs?"

"No, no; pounds sterling, of course. There are no emeralds in the world like them. Oh, what does all that matter? You must do something, get me away from here, help me! To think of what they have done, of what I have become—"

"All right," snapped Carson. "Keep quiet. Let me think, will you?"

He went to the door, listened, found the adjoining suite apparently empty now. The two men had departed. He glanced at the ports there. No bars. Then, fumbling for a cigarette, he lit it and turned. The girl sat with her face in her hands, motionless.

Terror had gripped her, and no wonder. But to Carson had come startled dismay and a full comprehension of everything. Now, for the first time, this apparently absurd affair resolved itself into grim coherency. The melodramatic plot pointing out Sir Basil Lohancs as something like a madman, now showed itself as an unscrupulous but thoroughly shrewd bit of deviltry with a very definite aim.

A million, two million pounds—there was a stake worth playing for! And in jewels, for which Sir Basil had an inordinate passion. A diabolic but perfectly safe scheme, too.

That marriage altered everything. Even if the girl had been carried off and drugged into signing everything, even if the marriage was in name only, Sir Basil was safe. Who would credit such a story, even did she live to tell it? Sir Basil's witnesses would brand it a lie. Not that it lay in Sir Basil's plans to let her do any telling, however.

Something of all this must have passed through the girl's mind also. Gradually she pulled herself together, until she looked up at Carson, then sprang to her feet.

"Out of here, out of here!" she exclaimed. "Helpless, yes; he will have false evidence, everything. What a fool I was to come aboard here with him! Yet I suspected nothing. Let me get away, help me, and I'll fight him, fight him, fight him in spite of everything!"

Her eyes shone like stars. She was suddenly alive with anger, with energy.

"Right," snapped Carson. "Keep your voice down, for heaven's sake! Let's go. They have the gangway guarded. Can you swim?"

"Yes. Miles," she said, tensely alert.

"Fine. Then we'll swim for it. All we need is to attract police attention, and the fight is on." Carson spoke jerkily, sharply, aroused to the passage of time. He glanced at her simple woolen sports costume. "You can't swim in those clothes. Strip—shoes, everything possible! I have some overalls; they call 'em dungarees here. Wait a minute."

He slipped into the adjoining cabins, empty now. Retrieving his dungarees, he came back and tossed them to her.

"Move fast! Get into these. I'll knock his whole game in the head if you get away now, if we start right in to raise hell with him. Later on, we'd not do so well. Kill you for a million or two million pounds, eh? You

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bet he would. Come on into the next cabin when you're ready."

He withdrew, puffing at his cigarette, wakened now to action. And, as the door closed, he saw her slipping out of her shoes, catching hurriedly at her dress. She was herself again.

Carson removed his own shoes, stripped to shirt and trousers. The port-hole was open, the round brass-bound glass flung far back; plenty of room for a person to squeeze through. He cursed under his breath at thought of it all. Marriage—probably a legal enough ceremony, even though she were drugged. Money, bribes, could do anything.

He went to the open port, looked out. This was the side of the yacht away from the wharf. There, not three hundred yards away, was anchored a tramp steamer, with two lighters at her gangway, booms and winches at work. Good! If they could make one of those lighters and hold off any boat from the yacht until the Thames police came along, all would be well.

Carson felt a touch on the shoulder.

"Oh, hello!" he exclaimed, and turned. "Are you ready—"

To his utter dismay, he found himself looking into the eyes of Sir Basil Lohancs, who stood there within a foot of him. That was all he remembered.

CHAPTER V.

DESPAIR HIS SOLE COMPANION.

TWO men had entered the cabin with Sir Basil. Dufour, whose hand had just struck Carson down, pocketed his slungshot, knelt, and drew the pistol from the pocket of the insensate American. He was a thick-set man, massive in build, with hard, square features. The second man was Devries, master of the yacht, a slim, wiry man of forty.

"Take him away," said Sir Basil. "Iron him and put him in a cabin for the present. We can turn him over to the police later on a charge of attempted robbery—I'll determine that when the time comes. Send those gentlemen of the press down here in five minutes."

The inanimate figure of Carson was lugged out. Sir Basil lit a cigar and glanced from the open port at the tramp steamer and its two lighters. The gardenia at his buttonhole lent his impeccably attired figure a hint of festive gaiety, belied by the powerful lines of his iron features and the smoldering fire in his dark eyes. Then he turned, as the connecting door opened and the Duchess Alixe appeared, now in the blue dungarees. At sight of him, she halted, a paralysis of dismayed recognition gripping her.

"Good day, my dear," and Sir Basil bowed to her. "A charming costume; but is it not a mere trifle indiscreet? In a moment or two there will be journalists here to receive the news of our wedding. If you will permit me to say so, I should prefer a more conventional dress."

Horror widened her eyes. She lifted a hand to her lips, checking an instinctive cry. Sir Basil smiled.

"Allow me to point out the unfortunate scandal that would ensue," he went on suavely, "were you to tell these newspaper men some wildly improbable story—especially in your present costume. You are at perfect liberty to see them, tell them what you like. In such an event, I should naturally be impelled to hush up the matter and have you committed to a private sanitarium for mental cases. In

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fact, I should be forced to do so. On the other hand, if you will retire to your own cabin, you will be quite unmolested there, and this evening I shall place a motor car at your disposal and allow you to depart with a man named Solomon. I do not know the person, but he is insistent—"

"Are you mad?" she cried out suddenly. "To do a thing like this, all of it—"

"Quite sane, my dear." Sir Basil bit at his cigar, with a curt nod. "You are my wife. Make the best of it. Now, take your choice. Do you wish to leave here to-night with this man Solomon, or shall you make a scene here and now?"

She stared wildly at him; then, with a low, choked cry, drew back into her own cabin and slammed the door. Sir Basil, with a quiet laugh, turned the key in the lock.

He swung around at hasty footsteps. It was Dr. Vecchini, thin, pallid, with intense black eyes and a pointed black beard.

"Ah, Vecchini!" he exclaimed quickly. "I am pleased with you. It was fortunate that you disregarded my orders to give her a morphia course, for I have changed my plans."

The pallid face of the Italian lighted up. "Ah! Then you are not angry!"

"On the contrary; but I do not advise you to repeat the experiment of trifling with my orders," said Sir Basil. "Did you bring the photographs as I requested?"

Vecchini produced a large envelope, from which Sir Basil took a number of photographs, inspecting them with a nod of approval. Captain Devries entered.

"Dufour is bringing the pressmen, sir. Ready?"

"Quite," and Sir Basil smiled.

He received the half-dozen men who crowded in behind Dufour, in his most charming manner. They were excited, as well they might be; they had been invited to receive a news story of the first magnitude, so far as the London press was concerned. Presently Sir Basil waved aside their eager questions.

"Gentlemen, it is entirely true. Duchess Alixe and I were quietly married aboard this yacht at Palermo. I regret that she is at the moment indisposed after her voyage and cannot receive you. Here are the papers concerning the marriage, which I may say was purely a love match. Here are photographs of us, taken before the ceremony. Doctor Vecchini, who acted as best man, and I are now entirely at your disposal if you have any questions."

THEY had; questions entirely discreet and respectful, as befitted the English press. Sir Basil held back nothing, spoke vaguely of future plans, regretted that he and his bride were leaving London at once.

"Certain repairs necessary to the yacht," he said affably, "have changed our plans. We shall leave this afternoon for Scotland. I think you can pick us up at Glasgow, Devries?"

"Easily, sir," returned Captain Devries.

The interview ended. Sir Basil went on deck with his guests, saw them off, then turned to a man waiting impatiently.

"Well?" he exclaimed. "What have you learned?"

"Little enough, Sir Basil. The man Carson is an engineer, who has been associated with this Solomon recently. Solomon himself is a person of rather large influence—"

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"I know all that," snapped Sir Basil. "But personally? Did you get a picture?"

"I did, sir—"

Seizing on the picture handed him, Sir Basil uttered an angry exclamation. A glitter came into his eyes; his dark features turned white with fury. This man, born in the Balkans, who had thrust himself into the front rank of industrial success and wealth, held in check behind his impassive demeanor a gusty torrent of human passions.

"That's the man who picked my pocket—and I let him go! All right. Have you located him?"

"No, Sir Basil. I've a dozen men working on it. He's not at his shop—"

"Your business is to find him; do it. And no excuses." Sir Basil turned away. "Vecchini! Come this way."

The Italian with the pointed beard accompanied him aft, and they took easy chairs beneath the awning there. A steward appeared, but Sir Basil waved him away.

"Now, Vecchini, pay close attention," he said. "That Carson is a fool; to think that a false mustache—well, never mind. Devries has put him somewhere, ironed. Look him up and give him a stiff injection that'll keep him quiet. To-night Devries can turn him over to the police, after you've gone."

"Gone?" echoed Vecchini inquiringly.

"Yes. I must get to the City at once and finish the business that brought me to London. It seems that the yacht must remain here four or five days, so I've changed all my plans. At seven o'clock to-night, I'll have a car here to take you and her away. Arrange with Therese to repeat the drug we gave her at Palermo. The car will take you both to an exclusive sanitarium in Kent, where private mental cases are treated. You'll remain as her personal physician and see to it that the usual legal phases of the matter are properly covered. Yes or no?"

"Yes, of course," said the Italian. "How long is she to stay there?"

"Indefinitely; until I send you a change of orders. You'll receive five hundred pounds a month and all expenses. Therese, by the way, will accompany you."

"Very well, sir. You may count on me," said Vecchini, his eyes shining eagerly.

"I'll return later in the afternoon, perhaps just in time for dinner." Sir Basil rose. "That's all. Ah, Devries!" He turned, as the captain approached. "You don't know yet how that fellow got aboard?"

"No, sir."

"You'd better have a care, Devries," and there was a sinister inflection in his voice. "I don't welcome incompetence, you know. Another slip, and you're broke. That's all."

When Sir Basil had departed, Doctor Vecchini went to his own cabin.

There he spent a few moments in preparing and loading a hypodermic syringe, which he carefully carried out and down the passage. Before one of the cabin doors, an Italian seaman in the uniform of the yacht was standing at ease.

"He is in here, eh?" said the doctor. "Safe?"

The man held up a small key, with a laugh. "Handcuffs, *signor*. You wish to enter?"

Vecchini nodded. The guard unlocked the door for him and stepped back. Passing in, Vecchini saw the figure of Carson lying on one of the two beds, wrists handcuffed, eyes closed, no doubt still unconscious.

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At this instant, he caught a shrill whistle from the deck above, an outburst of voices, the swift thudding of feet. His nerves jumped. He laid down the syringe on the vacant bed, then darted back to the door and flung it open.

"What's happened?" he demanded. The guard shrugged in ignorance. Vecchini hastened along the passage to the stairs, and so to the deck above. There he came upon a singular scene.

Near the gangway stood Captain Devries, facing a man who had just come aboard and who was now firmly held by two of the crew. An elderly, pudgy little man, his rotund features quite expressionless, his mild blue eyes apologetic.

"Yes, sir," he was saying to Devries. "I 'ave a message for Sir Basil, sir. Personal, it is, and if so be as I can see 'im—"

"You can't," snapped Devries, and then glanced at the empty wharf. The visitor had obviously come alone. Devries caught sight of Vecchini, and turned. "Oh, doctor, come here a minute."

VECCHINI complied. Captain Devries extended a photograph to him.

"Here's a picture of that man Solomon," he said in a low voice. "No doubt about it, is there?"

Vecchini laughed softly and returned the picture. "None, captain, none."

Grimly, Captain Devries turned to the pudgy little man.

"All right, you're going to see Sir Basil," he said. "But you can't see him until he returns aboard. And until then you're going to stay put, my man. What's your business with him?"

"Well, sir, it ain't to be made public," said Solomon apologetically. Devries motioned to his seamen.

"Search him."

Vecchini, with a grin, turned away and hurried back to his job below.

Gaining the cabin, he found the door again locked. The guard opened it; he was taking no chances whatever. Vecchini went in, closed the door, picked up the syringe, and stepped to the bed where the prisoner lay with eyes closed.

Carson was wearing only shirt and trousers. Leaning forward, Vecchini opened one cuff and turned it back, laying bare the forearm. He took up a bit of skin between finger and thumb, and was on the point of inserting the needle, when something happened.

The bound wrists of the prisoner flew up. The handcuffs, which were of a heavy type, caught Vecchini under his bearded chin and chucked his head back—hard. He lost balance. Next instant Carson's hands had him around the throat, fingers sinking into the flesh.

The syringe flew through the air and smashed. Vecchini, half lying across the bed, thrashed furiously but vainly. No sound came from him. He tore at Carson's hands, but the grip of those steel fingers could not be loosened.

Gradually the efforts of the Italian lessened. His face was turning purple. His tongue protruded, his eyes were horrible to see; convulsive gasps of his choked lungs shook his whole body. Then his arms fell and he went limp. Carson relaxed his grip, made sure the man was not shamming, then let him fall beside the bed.

"Done it!"

With the exultant words, Carson came to his feet. Except for a bump on the head, he was quite himself. He looked down at Vecchini.

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"A little more, and you'd have got what you deserved," he muttered. "But I'm no murderer. Trying to give me a shot, eh? Not this trip, thanks. Now, if I had something to take care of that guard—"

He glanced around. Handcuffed wrists are no great impediment to the use of the hands; a grunt of satisfaction broke from him as he perceived, above the washstand, a heavy glass water carafe in its rack. Carson reached it down, gripped it carefully in both hands, and went to the door. This he kicked lightly, and stood waiting, the carafe poised.

As he had anticipated, the seaman outside threw open the door and entered the cabin.

The carafe crashed down with stunning force. The man pitched forward and lay motionless.

Guessing that this man held the key of his handcuffs, Carson knelt and searched swiftly for it. In his eagerness, he did not observe that the cabin door still stood ajar. Next instant he had found the key he desired. At the man's waist was belted an automatic pistol. Everything! Freedom, a weapon—he was not going to be taken unawares again! Once rid of these steel bracelets, he would turn the tables with a vengeance.

The key between his teeth, he was trying to work it in the lock of the handcuffs as he knelt, when a sudden tramp of feet startled him. He looked up, saw the open door, and tried to gain his feet—too late.

A sharp order. Devries himself, and two seamen, came bursting in the doorway as Carson tried desperately to get the door shut. Then they had him, holding him helpless; and Carson, sick with futile hope, looked into the passage and saw John Solomon standing there, arms held by two more seamen. Solomon! A prisoner!

Then the door was slammed, cutting off further sight of the passage. Devries, finding that Vecchini was not dead, turned in a cold fury to Carson.

"Handy devil with your hooks, aren't you? Well, this finishes you, my man. Assault and attempted murder, eh? This guarantees you a nice little stay in prison. Here, hold out your hands—we'll just make sure of you this time."

Carson's handcuffs were released, then snapped on again; this time with his hands about the brass bed-post. He said nothing; talk was useless. Solomon was a prisoner likewise.

Vecchini and the seaman were taken out. Carson, ironed to the bed, was left alone with despair for his sole companion.

CHAPTER VI.

SNARED!

IT was six thirty that evening when Sir Basil Lohancs returned to his yacht. This time he arrived in a large limousine which, with great care, drew up on the wharf beside the gangway, and remained there.

Captain Devries met the owner and made his report, curtly enough. A gleam of savage joy lit up the dark features of Sir Basil, and he clapped Devries heartily on the shoulder.

"Good, good; better than I had dared hope, Devries. What about the workmen?"

"They've cleared off long ago, sir. I tried to have night shifts put on, to get the work done sooner, but for some reason it was impossible. Five days we'll have to lie here, I'm afraid."

"No matter," said Sir Basil tri-

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umphantly. "It'll fit in all the better, as things are now. Where's Vecchini? Not too badly hurt, I trust?"

"He should be all right now. I've sent for him, sir. Do you want to see the two men?"

"Not yet; later. We'll get Vecchini off with my wife, first thing. Ah, here we are."

Vecchini appeared, pale and shaken; he had been a very sick man, and had not repeated his attempt to give Carson an injection. He could do it now, he said, if desired; but Sir Basil, rubbing his hands, merely laughed.

"No, no, let it go now. We'll turn over both men to the police as soon as you're out of the way with her. Come along."

With Vecchini, he went to the suite of the Duchess Alixe. There the woman Therese opened the door, smiling.

"She drank the tea, sir," said Therese calmly. "She's all ready to go, I think."

She was, indeed. Duchess Alixe looked up at them as they entered her cabin; her gaze was blank, stupid, she did not know them. She moved mechanically and obeyed orders listlessly, without protest.

"Pack at once, get off in five minutes," said Sir Basil. "The driver of the car has full instructions."

Under his eye, it was done. He himself escorted the duchess on deck and to the waiting car, treating her with a scrupulous politeness as though she were indeed his wife—as she was in fact. Vecchini and Therese got in with her, the luggage was disposed, and the driver saluted Sir Basil as he started the engine.

When the car had gone, Sir Basil turned to Devries.

"And now for the prisoners," he said. "Better fetch them into the saloon, and have them well guarded. Send a man to the night watchman's office on the wharf, and have him telephone for the police to take two men in charge. I'll lay criminal charges against them."

Five minutes later Carson was marched out of his cabin, handcuffed, and in the large, brilliantly lighted saloon found Solomon awaiting him, under guard. Sir Basil, with Devries and the bulky Frenchman, Dufour, beside him, sat at a table. Beyond a brief nod, Solomon took no apparent notice of Carson, but fastened his placid blue gaze on Sir Basil.

The latter regarded his two prisoners affably, but in his dark eyes lurked a flame.

"You fools," he said with bland contempt, "I hope you've learned a lesson. Solomon, you and your man here are to be prosecuted for assault, attempted murder, and any other charges that I can file. That is precisely all you'll get out of pitting yourself against me."

"Yes, sir," responded Solomon mildly, even apologetically. "But if I might make so bold, Sir Basil, I've been workin' on me statement of accounts with you. And 'ere they are, sir, all shipshape and Bristol fashion. If you'd be so good as to cast your eye over it—"

He held out a little red notebook. At a gesture from Sir Basil, one of the guards took it and laid it on the table.

"Your accounts with me, indeed! A fine impertinence—"

Contemptuously, Sir Basil picked up the little book and ruffled through its pages. Some entry caught his eye; he frowned, looked more closely. His eye flashed. His dark features became

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livid with anger. He dashed the notebook to the floor and leaped to his feet.

"You insufferable ass!" he cried furiously. "How dare you—how dare you! My wife has left the yacht, do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," returned Solomon. "I thought as 'ow she would, sir, if you 'ad to lay up 'ere for several days."

Carson started slightly, looked at Solomon; something in that wheezy voice, in those words, drew his attention.

Sir Basil rapped out an oath expressing his furious wrath.

"What do you mean? Confound you, Solomon—what do you mean?"

"Why, sir, it's all werry simple," returned Solomon. "You see, I've 'ad me men watching for any car leaving the wharf, just like that. By this time, I expects as 'ow they've stopped that 'ere car wi' the duchess and 'ave took 'er out—"

"Bah! You can't dare interfere with my wife, you fool. What is it, eh?" Sir Basil turned, as one of the yacht's officers entered and came to him, speaking in a low voice. "Oh, indeed! From Palermo, you say? With a message— Well, show the fellow in. Yes, at once. It may be important."

CARSON glanced at John Solomon, and caught a peculiar look from those mild blue eyes, a look that hinted of some inner astonishment, even excitement. Then he turned as a man was led into the cabin, and walked forward to the table where Sir Basil sat.

For this man was the queer little gnome-like Merlin, huge mustaches and all, the husband of the woman who had given her life to save her mistress.

Crushing his hat in his hands, Merlin advanced, his eyes fastened on Sir Basil. He spoke in Italian.

"Good evening, excellency. You do not remember me?"

"I do not," snapped Sir Basil, regarding him curiously. "You have a message for me?"

"Yes, excellency."

"Well, deliver it. Whom is it from?"

"From my wife, excellency. Who was poisoned last night at your orders—"

"What?"

Sir Basil's eyes widened. He half started to his feet, but he was too slow.

From the hands of the little Sicilian fell the twisted hat. In its place was a pistol. The shots rang out, two of them, a third. Sir Basil half turned, clutched at his throat, and fell back into his chair.

Like a flash, the killer darted for the entrance. He did not make it. The pistol of Captain Devries exploded. The Sicilian fell like a rabbit shot in midcourse.

He rolled over and over, then lay quiet. The pistol, escaping his grasp, slid almost to Carson's feet.

Pandemonium filled the cabin, men came rushing in. Solomon and Carson were shoved into a corner and held there, guarded. Sir Basil had dropped into his chair, head and arms lying across the table. Dufour lifted his head, let it down again with a hoarse word.

"Dead!"

Carson glanced dazedly at the pistol on the carpet.

He lifted startled eyes to meet the blankly impassive gaze of John Solomon.

"That pistol!" he exclaimed. "It's

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like the little Browning you gave me, John. What do you know about this business? What was written in that little red notebook?"

"Why, sir," said Solomon placidly, quite ignoring the rushing figures, the excited voices all around, "that's something as a good many people would like to know, but I ain't never told, 'cause why, nobody would believe me if I told the truth—"

"Did you plan this murder?"

"I don't know nothing about it," said Solomon blankly and in an innocent sort of way.

Then his face changed and a wheezy sigh of satisfaction escaped him. Into the cabin had walked two police officers, and a sudden silence fell. Abruptly everything was changed.

A new and greater hand had taken charge here, of ship and men both, a hand strong and powerful.

Later, handcuffs removed but still under guard, Carson turned to his companion.

"And we're still going to jail, are we?"

"I'm werry much afraid as 'ow we are, Mr. Carson," said Solomon, sucking contentedly at his clay pipe. "This 'ere Sir Basil laid a trap and fell into it 'is own self. It's the duchess as will 'ave everything now—she's 'is wife and no mistake. And a werry fine widow she'll make, too. As soon as she comes to 'erself, she'll back up our story and this 'ole blessed thing will be cleaned up. You'll notice them 'ere police are 'olding every man aboard 'ere.

"But we may 'ave to spend part o' the night in jail all the same."

"And cheap at the price," murmured Carson, who was glad to have 'ere. But we may 'ave to spend part o' confined quarters.

"Yes, sir. Cheap at the price, and dirt cheap too, as the old gent said when 'e buried 'is second. You know what them Arab friends o' mine say: What is written is written, and no man can understand the ways of Allah!"

Which, so far as John Solomon was concerned, closed the case of the kidnaped duchess. But as for Carson—well, who could know the most beautiful woman in Europe and not love her?

And she had not only beauty, but intelligence and poise and grace—which leaves little to be desired.

THE END

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A roaring-mad creature burst on the scene

His pedigree was uncertain, but his courage and his intelligence were to save his master's life—and something just as precious as life

Thor

By ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE

THOR'S first consciousness was of a hand as big as his own pudgy body—a hand that lifted him from the cabin floor and thrust his nose into the cover of a baking powder tin. The shallow cover was full of warm milk.

The puppy struggled and squirmed and gagged as his nose was shoved downward into it. He licked the stuff from his lips and muzzle and found it tasted good. At the next dip Thor squirmed less vehemently and licked with more unction.

In three days he was lapping milk, on his own account from the tin, without spattering more than half of it on the stone hearth. The problem of weaning him was solved. Also, he was growing to loathe less and less the feel and the scent of the huge hand which poured the milk for him and guided his wabbling steps to the feed dish.

There had been a round-up—a battue—of the ever-increasing pack of wild dogs which roamed the trackless hills back of Gusepple. Gaunt, gigantic, blackish masterless curs they were,

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crossed far back and repeatedly with a wolf strain. Every few years a dearth of game among the hills forced them to descend into the valley, to ravage farms and villages and to inflict wholesale slaughter on hencoop and sheepfold and barnyard.

Then it was that farm folk and hunters from the villages would hold the grim doghunt which left the valley free of the pests for another half decade. The surviving curs would hide in terror far back among the hills, the punitive lesson learned for a while.

Cæsar Blent fared forth from his hillside farmhouse three days after the latest battue, to mark trees for fall cutting in his farthest woodlot. As he was descending toward his log house at sunset he heard through the forest stillness a grating sound, something between a grunt of keen discomfort and a growl.

It came from behind a rotting windfall against the side of a shale-shelf. Cæsar investigated.

Tucked out of sight from any casual eye, in the sheltered angle between the shale and the decaying trunk, lay three gray-black furry mites of puppies. They looked more like wolf whelps than liks dogs. Two of them were dead, their bodies still warm. The third was voicing his hunger and desolation in the series of grunting growls which Cæsar had heard.

He did not whine nor yelp as would the ordinary domestic month-old pup left to starve. There was only defiant anger in his tone. Not terror or pain.

The situation told its town story to Cæsar Blent. This was the lair of a wild wolf dog of the hills. The mother of the three pups must have been one of the thirty-odd canine fugitives shot during the battue. Two of her babies had starved to death in her absence. The strongest of the three still clung valiantly to life.

BLENT stooped over and picked up the living pup by the scruff of neck. This, in order to lift him over the windfall to a level spot where he might better be able to drive his heel into the youngster's skull and thus rid the hills of one more canine pest.

An ordinary puppy would have dangled helpless, picked up in this fashion. A fox or wolf cub would not. Nor did this starving baby. With all his waning strength and with amazing speed the pup wrenched his neck around, under its loose folds of skin, and dug his needle-sharp milk teeth deep into the flesh of Cæsar Blent's thumb. This with a truly murderous falsetto snarl.

Blent did not dash the plucky youngster to the ground and stamp him to death. Instead, his saturnine face twisted into a smile of genuine approval. There was something so fearless, so pitifully defiant about the action—something which touched a responsive chord in the lonely man's heart.

On queer impulse he thrust the snarling morsel of fluff into his coat pocket and bore it home.

Why he did such a silly thing, Blent himself could not have told. Nor why he took the pains to make a rag-lined shoe box bed for the beast in a corner of his kitchen, nor why he heated milk and beat an egg into it and then proceeded to teach the baby dog to feed himself.

As the days went on, the man found a certain joy in obliterating the pup's inherent wolf hate and distrust for man. It was fun, bit by bit, to notice the lessening of those threatening falsetto snarls and of the needle teeth's

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failure to slash at the caressingly guiding hand.

When at last the newcomer actually tumbled out of his rag-lined bed and staggered across the floor, tail awag, to greet Cæsar on the man's return home from the village, Blent knew the conquest was complete. He felt an inordinate pride in what he had achieved.

"Good boy!" he applauded, gathering up the non-resisting puppy from the floor and rubbing him behind the ears and rumpling the head. "Good boy! You're a *dog*. Not a varmint. You've just proved that. First dog I ever had was named 'Thor.' I was just a kid. He was going to be shot because the law said he was 'incurably vicious.' I bought him for a dollar from the poundmaster. And I trained him. They tell me I've got a way with animals that most folks haven't. Anyhow, I trained the viciousness out of him and turned him into the grandest dog ever. Just as I'm going to do with you, sonny. And I'm naming you 'Thor,' after him. Like the name? It's yours, whether you like it or not. I'll teach you to answer to it, first thing in educating you. I'm planning to give you a dandy education, Thor, before we're through. It'll keep me from being so sick-lonesome, for one thing. For another thing, I think you'll be worth it."

THUS began Thor's education. It continued unbrokenly for a year.

Blent was an inspired trainer. Never before had he had such a pupil. Perhaps Thor's mongrel ancestry, perhaps his wolf-strain, gave him an uncanny intelligence and quickness of perception that were a delight to his master.

He learned faster and more eagerly than Blent could teach him.

Long before he was a year old, Thor could round up the cows from their hillside pastures and drive them gently to the barnyard and through its gateway and sort them out and guide each to her own stall; then shut the gate of the yard and shove its rude latch into place. In like manner, next morning, he could unlatch the gate and drive the herd to pasture and shut and latch the pasture gate. Many a farm dog before him had learned to do the same thing, but none with greater skill or zest.

This was but one of a score of chores Thor mastered with bewildering ease. He worshipped his lonely master—whose loneliness had vanished somehow with the advent of the wolf-dog—but he would accept no friendship overtures from anyone else. He was not vicious. He was merely anti-social.

Cæsar Blent had inherited his two hundred acre hillside-and-mountain farm from his father, along with the stanch old log house. His father had been an inspired farmer of the old school and had taught Cæsar a rare knowledge of his trade.

As a result, Blent made a fair living, even in the modern days when farming in the East has lost so much of its olden profits.

His truck garden, his hillside crops, his dairy products, the return from his many acres of timber land on the higher slopes of the Ramapos—these made him enough money—these and tireless and clever toil—to make him independent.

He kept to himself as much as he could. Not that he had been born anti-social, like Thor, but because of a mess his father had gotten into, years agone, over a bunch of sheep whose ownership was debatable.

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Cæsar had known his father was innocent of running them off by night and selling them as his own. Even the law at last had freed the defendant on a technicality. But the Valley farmers and the village folk had looked askance at him, and in only a lesser degree at his young son, who had been co-defendant in the suit.

Broodingly, Cæsar Blent had avoided his neighbors as much as he could, after his father's death; detesting them for their suspicions of a square old man. And the neighbors—with all the long memory for scandals which is part and parcel of a small community—let him pretty much alone.

From utter desolation of soul the man had been saved by the coming of Thor. The two were inseparable chums and fellow-workers.

VISITORS were a rarity at Blent's farmhouse. Thus, as Cæsar sat on his handkerchief-sized porch one sunset, smoking an after-supper pipe and with Thor snoozing at his feet, he looked up in mild astonishment to see a black-clad man turn in at his gate and come along the path toward him. Thor jumped up, his hackles bristling. At a word from his master, the dog checked his rush.

Cæsar recognized his visitor. The man was Jared Tice, local United States revenue officer, who had been quartered at Gusepple for the past year or more in an effort to check the thriving little moonshine trade in the mountains back of the farm.

"Evening, Blent," the revenue man hailed him, seating himself uninvited on the porch step, beside his unresponsive host. "I thought I'd drop in for a little chat."

Cæsar made no reply to this jaunty greeting. He was recalling how a Gusepple constable had "dropped in" like this on his father, twelve years earlier, and had departed escorting a handcuffed prisoner accused of sheep-stealing. Apparently neighbors "dropped in" at the log house only when trouble was brewing for the house's occupants.

"How's crops?" asked Tice, ignoring his host's dearth of civility.

"Some better. Some worse. Some not at all," was the glum retort. "How's the spy business? Bribed any more poor yaps to betray their moonshine friends to you, lately?"

"I hear you raise quite a corn crop every year," pursued Tice, unruffled. "What do you do with it all?"

"Keep most of it to feed my stock," said Blent. "What I don't need, I sell. Any business of yours what I do with it?"

"Maybe it is. Maybe it isn't. You sell some of it, hey? Where to? Up the mountain? Corncrib empty some morning and a fifty-dollar bill stuck under your door?"

"Sure. And with a note from you saying there'll be another fifty in it for me if I'll confess what moonshiner I sold it to. You're getting kind of fat and pussy, Mister Tice. I think a nice fast walk would be good for you. A walk in any direction but here. If you want a pacemaker, all I need is to say just a word to Thor here and he'll run you ragged. Think it over. And do your thinking on the other side of my road-fence. G'night."

Chirping to Thor, he went into the kitchen and shut and bolted the door noisily behind him. Through the window he could see Jared Tice get slowly to his feet and stroll away.

"He's gone, Thor," mumbled Cæsar. "And he's gone with a flea in his ear. At that, I was a fool, Thor. I ought

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to have been nice and meachin' to him, and showed him the receipts for all the corn I sold to the Paterson Feed Company. But he got me riled, Thor. Now he'll suspicion more'n ever that I sell my corn to that moonshine crowd up in the hills. Lord, but I'd sooner burn it than that! Those poison-distillers are worse than Jared Tice—if that's anyways possible, Thor."

THE September solstice set in with days of sluicing rain—tne equinox—that flooded lowlands and spread brooks into rivers and carried rivers above their wooded banks and far out into road and field. Not for years had there been such a downpour in the Ramapo country.

On the first clear morning Cæsar Blent bade Thor drive the cows up into the highest of his hill pastures. He did not want them bogging down in the lower meadows whence the water had not yet drained. Then he himself made the round of his land, to find what harm the avalanche of water had done.

That afternoon, late, he sent Thor back to the uppermost pasture to bring home the cows to the night milking. Soon down the rough slopes marched the cows in single file, Thor bringing up the rear. The dog had none of his wonted jauntiness as he sped his charges in through the barnyard gate and to their special stalls.

As soon as this was achieved, he came galloping over to Blent, who was on his way to the milking. Peering worriedly up into his master's face, Thor ran a few steps back over the path he and the cows had taken, then to Cæsar and up the path again. Cæsar did not need a second hint that something was gravely amiss and that Thor wanted to lead him to the scene of trouble.

First the man's glance swept the stalled cows. One stall was gapingly empty. A stall where a much-prized young Guernsey should have been standing. Then, catching up a stick, he followed Thor up the hill. To the high pasture hurried the dog, Cæsar toiling along behind him as fast as he might. Even at that height, the sward was jellylike and quaking from the long hammering of the rain. Thor led the way to a fence which separated the pasture's uppermost side from the higher ground and the woods and rocks above.

There was a spot where a panel of rails had fallen down, undermined by the flood. Distinct, on both sides of this opening were the hoofprints of a single cow, fresh in the muddy earth. Near them were the lighter marks of a dog's pads. Thor did not pause, but kept straight on, looking back now and then to make certain Blent was following.

Through brush and over rocks and skirting high boulders and low cliffs, man and dog went for more than a furlong. Then Thor stopped. He halted above the moveless body of a cow—the missing Guernsey. She was lying on her side, as if dead. Cæsar leaned over her. Then he sniffed suspiciously.

As if the sniff were a signal, the cow groaned loudly and staggered to her knees and to her feet. She took a few wavering steps. Then with a hic-coughing bellow she attempted to leap high in the air. This effort all but sent her sprawling again. But she righted herself and set off at a devious set of angles and at a swaying pace, in no special direction at all.

Instantly, Thor was after her. Guiding her with much difficulty he directed her shambling, uncertain steps

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toward the distant gap in the fence. Through the gap and down the hill he drove her, while she swayed and pranced and cantered and made sidewise dashes. Cæsar stood staring after the two. He sniffed the windless air again.

"She is drunk!" he told himself. "Crazy drunk. There's no fermenting apples up here for her to get at. Besides that's the smell of—of *mash!*"

As he muttered, he set himself into motion, sniffing over and over again to direct his course. Also he was following the print of the drunken cow's hoofs in the mud. They were easy to trace, except over the many outcrops of rock.

PRESENTLY, after skirting through cliff edges and boring almost impenetrable thickets, he was at a standstill. At his feet was a wide fissure in the rocks, a fissure through which ordinarily any quantity of water could have run down into the underground clefts of granite. But the rain had sent masses of soil and of leaves and twigs into it, momentarily stopping up its lower spaces.

Thus, rising to the surface was a thick scum, which gave forth a pungently strong reek. From this stuff, to judge by the braced hoofprints, the cow had drunk long and satisfyingly. Herce her condition.

Blent had turned into a human sleuth hound. Moving noiselessly, taking mental note of every turn and cliff top, he half ran uphill along the line of the fissure, to a point where it dived under the stony surface of the ground. Cæsar stood confronted by a steep-rising precipice of granite, perhaps twenty feet high. Baffled, he stared about him.

A few yards to his right, the wall of rock had a slight indentation. In front of this was a tangled mass of vine and underbrush. But he noted that sumac and wild grape were part of the mass. These, as a rule, do not grow luxuriantly so high on the mountain's face.

The man moved forward and sought to cleave a noiseless way through the tangle. The task was absurdly easy. The foliage was a mere shallow screen, masking the entrance to one of the scores of Ramapo hillside caves. Some of the bushes came out of the ground as he clutched them. Through them from the cavern beyond seeped not only a light but the intensified reek of the pungency which had been teasing his nostrils.

In through the entrance Cæsar Blent stepped, and stood staring.

The cave was illuminated by an oil lamp set on a ledge in the rock wall. Beside it, unlighted, was the stump of a candle.

The cavern was fitted up as a rude but highly efficient still.

A man was bending over a simmering boiler. A second man was emptying a tub of mash down a wide crack in the stone floor—mash which should have seeped down along the deep fissure outside until the earth or a subterranean hole could absorb it; but which now, by reason of the freshet's dam of dirt and pebbles and twigs, was destined to lie along the surface of the cleft for hundreds of yards.

A stone rolled loudly from under Blent's foot. Both men wheeled to face him. He recognized them as Abner Coghlin and Abe Struse, two Jackson Whites who sometimes did a lazy day's woodchopping for him in late autumn.

"Nice outfit you two cheap crooks have got here," remarked Cæsar, breaking the moment's tight silence. "I see now why you can do so little real

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work and yet have so much cash to spend. If—"

ONE of the men stooped and caught up a rifle that lay against the wall. He leveled it at Blent. The other man edged toward the intruder, along the wall's uneven edge. Cæsar gripped his futile stick more closely.

"Mr. Blent," drawled Struse, from behind his gun, "I got nothing ag'in you. But you've saw too much for it to be safe for us to let you go and blab. I'm real sorry to do what I gotta do. But it's you or us. You won't be the first."

"I know I won't," was Cæsar's calm answer. "Three people from hereabouts have disappeared, since I can remember. I figured it was the moonshine crowd that got them. Easy to drop a guy down a crevice up here in the hills where crevices are plenty. Or to—"

"Got any prayers to say?" queried Coghlin. "Because—"

"Not aloud, for you swine to hear," snapped Blent. "But I've got a handful of words to say about men who earn a living by making this raw poison and selling it. Men who stain their hands with blood by killing folks who—Why!" he broke off, "that fool rifle of yours isn't even cocked!"

Struse glanced involuntarily down at his gun—which proved to be correctly cocked—and as he did so Cæsar Blent threw the club-headed stick with all his force at the smoky lamp.

The cave was plunged in black darkness, but for the faint glints of sunset light which filtered through the ingenious screen of vines and bushes. Blent flung himself prone of the ground as he hurled the club.

A shot roared and reverberated throughout the cavern at the same instant, the ball flattening itself against the wall where Blent had been standing a fraction of a second earlier.

Cæsar wriggled on his stomach toward the screen of leaves at the entrance. But he was an instant too late. Coghlin leaped on his back, driving him downward, and held him thus. As Blent sought to writhe himself free, Struse threw himself upon him.

Coghlin pinioned the writhing Blent to the floor by sheer weight. Struse used the moment of vain struggle to draw from his hip pocket a long and sharp-bladed clasp knife. Twisting his face, in a wildly impotent effort to shake free from the two bodies on his back, Cæsar had a dim glimpse of an upraised blue blade.

"Between the shoulders and a wee peckle to the left!" ordained Coghlin.

THE dark cave waxed lighter briefly as the lower part of the screen was swept away. Through the aperture dashed something huge, blackish, terrible. Something that snarled and whined far down in its throat, like a tiger above its prey.

Thor had driven the drunken Guernsey home and into her own stall. Then, shoving shut the gate of the barnyard and snapping down its latch, he had trotted back, as ever, to rejoin his master. It was the simplest thing imaginable for him to follow Blent's footsteps from the spot where he and Cæsar had parted. He reached the cave in time to see his human god pinned to earth under two men who seemed to be making a very industrious effort to kill him.

Thor went berserk at the sight.

To the two Jackson Whites in the instant of their victory a roaring-mad creature burst upon the scene. Right

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and left Thor slashed and tore and ripped; heedless which of the two assailants he ravaged. His formidable jaws worked hard and fast and impartially. He was as a rabid brute turned loose in an arena.

Screeching, shoving at him, the Jackson Whites abandoned their prey. Cæsar Blent struggled to his feet. Thor had one man down and was striving to get at his jugular, all the time whimpering in a fury too deep for bark or growl. Struse, under that onslaught, howled and kicked. He thrust with both hands at the homicidal brute. At once both hands were shredded to the very bone.

Blent got to his feet, set himself and struck with all his skilled strength for the jaw of the addle-brained Coghlin. Under that frightful impact, Coghlin crumpled as though his joints had turned to tallow. It did not require the impact of his back skull against a floor rock to smite him senseless.

To the candle on the shelf where had stood the shattered lamp lurched Cæsar. With bleeding and shaky fingers he struck a match and lighted it. At the same time he panted to Thor:

"Let him alone! But *watch* him!"

The giant dog understood. He drew back in reluctance from the slaughter, crouching tensely in front of his victim as if waiting for Struse's first move. Coghlin groaned and sat up, his pale eyes a blank.

"Listen, you two!" commanded Blent. "Listen good and hard. If you will give me your oaths before Almighty God to demolish this still—that means to smash every part of it to bits—and to go in for decent work instead of making this lousy stuff—I'll let you loose. I'll even give you wood chopping jobs later in the fall. I don't want to shame this region I love by smearing a moonshine scandal all over the newspapers. Or to tickle Jared Tice. Give up moonshining and I'll call it square and let you go free. How about it?"

Loud and long the two chattering victims swore to do as he bade them.

"Good!" asssented Cæsar. "Now I'm going home. There I'm going to write out this whole thing. Your names and all. I'm going to take it this evening to Dr. Page. He's the one man in Gusepple I know I can bank on. He was my dad's chum. I'll tell him if ever I disappear or if I'm killed or if this dog is poisoned or shot or if any of my buildings catch fire, to read the paper and then turn it over to the law. I'm going home now. Like I told you. But there's something to do first."

He picked up the rifle. With one mighty and finger-numbing blow he shattered its stock against the stone side of the cave. Then in three harder blows he bent the steel barrel into an impossible angle. Once more bidding Thor "watch" the two men, he searched them and the cavern for other weapons. Except for Struse's long clasp knife there were none. Blent snapped both blades of this against the wall.

Then, with Thor at his side, he made his way homeward down the mountainside, first ripping away every vestige of vines and bushes from the mouth of the cave and leaving the entrance unmasked.

AUTUMN was gone. The high-country winter had set in. It had been a hustlingly busy three months for Cæsar and for such few men as he hired from time to time. But now began the bleak season which means comparative rest to all formers. Twenty-odd loads of Blent's firewood lay cut and corded in his topmost

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woodlot, awaiting the first snow heavy enough to allow the flat sleds to cart it down to the wood yards in the valley.

From time to time Cæsar visited these piles of hewn firewood, to make certain no Jackson White or other marauder had not helped himself from them. One of these inspections was made on a late afternoon in December. Being weatherwise, Blent read the signs in the soft skies and in the unwonted balminess and in the horizon haze and in a vast line of on-creeping black clouds. If he did not visit his woodpiles that afternoon it might be many a long day before he could plow a path through the snow to the high mountainside lot.

With Thor as ever beside him the man made his rounds of the stacked cords. None had been molested. Then, as he was about to start downhill, homeward, his eye roved the skies again in some slight worry; a worry his dog shared. The mild air had cooled fast and ominously. The horizon-wide barrier of black clouds had swept onward until they all but covered the sunset heavens. Spits of snow were scudding from them, pushed by an ever-stronger breeze. No mountaineer in that region needed more distinct signs.

As Blent's eyes shifted from the clouds they came to rest, first idly, then with angry intentness, at something a half mile beyond and above him. From where he stood, now that the falling of the summer foliage had left the mountainside naked to view, he could see clearly the precipice rock at whose foot was the cave wherein he had found the still.

He could see the spot where he had ripped the screen of fake verdure from the cavern mouth. But no longer was there a gaping hole. The aperture was filled with artistic cleverness by what looked like a clump of growing oak-seedlings whose red-brown leaves masked the entrance.

Hot with indignation that Struse and Coghlin had abused his trust and had b r o k e n their oaths, Cæsar swarmed up the steep ascent, guided by his woodsman memory of his former route. The snow was falling faster now and the wind had begun to take on a faint singing note. Dusk was closing in. Blent ignored these unmistakable portents, in his wrath at the still's continuance.

Panting, he reached the screen of oak-boughs and rent them aside. As he did so he heard a scurrying sound from within the cave. But as he pushed inward he found the room vacant. Doubtless the place had a tunnel exit as well as an entrance; an exit Struse and Coghlin had had no time to make use of when he had surprised them before.

The match he had struck burned to an end. But not before he had crossed to the lamp. Its chimney was still too hot to be touched by the bare hand. Putting on his mittens, he lifted the chimney and relighted it. Then he peered around. The still was intact. As before, the cauldron simmered above its fire. A small heap of fuel lay beside it.

CAREFULLY Blent inspected the whose cavern, even to a half-concealed tunnel at the rear, a tunnel evidently leading out to some opening beyond the rock wall. Through this aperture the wind sucked ever more noisily, making the lamp's smoky light waver. Blent turned back toward the entrance. It was high time to get out of this lofty spot before the impending blizzard should break. Already the doorway was white with snow.

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When he was halfway across the floor his dog growled deeply in sudden warning and darted forward with lowered head. Instinctively, Cæsar called him back, just as the entrance was blocked by something that shut out the snow whirl and the dusk.

In through the cave mouth barged three men. All carried pistols in their hands. Foremost of them was Jared Tice. Close at his heels hurried Wayne, the township police chief; and Braden, the Gusepple constable. On their faces was a glow of high triumph. The three pistols covered the dumfounded Cæsar, the trigger fingers itching for action.

"Hands up!" snapped Tice. "Up *high!*"

At the command, Thor lunged forward, murderously, avid to defend the man who was his god. Chief Wayne's pistol-muzzle shifted from Blent to the charging dog.

"Back, Thor!" ordered Cæsar, his hands aloft. "Back here! Lie down!"

Hating to comply with the panted mandate, Thor obeyed, snarling, and with his white eyeteeth aglint. He crouched at his master's feet, as Wayne advanced toward Cæsar. Yanking Blent's wrist downward, one after the other, the chief clicked a pair of handcuffs on them; then searched him in vain for weapons. Jared Tice was grinning blissfully, from ear to ear.

"Here's my dividends for close to two years' work!" he chortled. "They told me at headquarters nobody was able to turn the trick. But I told 'em *I* could. And I've done it. Found the still and nabbed the crook that runs it! I've been suspicioning you, Blent, almost ever since I settled down in Gusepple."

"Yes," assented Cæsar, dully. "So I figured. I—"

"We three were coming back, just now, from one of our hunts for it," exulted Tice, "when I caught sight of you, way off, sneaking up the hill. We watched you and we saw you push away the bushes you'd put there at the door, and crawl in. That was enough. It—"

"It was too much," amended Cæsar. "If you'll stop yapping a minute, I'll tell you the rest of it."

Briefly, concisely, yet leaving out no needful detail, he told how he found the mash and traced it to this cavern.

"SO you figure Struse and the other chap broke their word and opened up the still again?" queried Wayne, "and that you heard them running out of here through that fissure back yonder when you came here to-day?"

"I don't 'figure'," said Blent. "I *know*. A little more caution and I'd have caught them both."

"Now that's real int'resting!" chuckled Braden, the constable. "And it proves just how true the rest of your yarn is. Last night there was a booze battle down at Blore's saloon! Me and the chief here burst it up. And we nabbed Coghlin and Struse and three others. All drunk. All disorderly. And we clapped 'em into the Gusepple lockup, to wait till Judge Ferris gets back to-morrow. The pair of 'em is in there, all snug, in cells. Grand testimony you're giving, Blent!"

"Then—then—" faltered Cæsar, "they were only two members of a much bigger gang. I might have known those two blockheads couldn't swing such a big deal by themselves. If I'd thought—"

"You'll have a passel of years to do your thinking in," Wayne consoled him. "Prison is a grand place for thinking, they say."

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"Go to Dr. Page and get the envelope I left with him in September," urged Cæsar, bewildered, dazed. "That'll tell you the truth about the—"

"Now," interposed Jared Tice, "that was really smart. It showed foresight, in case you was ever to be caught. But it isn't evidence. It won't carry a tenth of an ounce of weight in any court. Nothing to substantiate it."

He snickered. The mirth was echoed by the other officers. Thor growled, thunderously, deep down in his throat. A mighty gust of wind swirled in through the cave's mouth, bearing with it a bushel of snow.

Cæsar Blent stared sharply out into the dusk. Then he lifted his head and laughed aloud.

"COME!" said Tice, "let's be going. It's dark and it's cold and it's snowing heavy. Best tie him up, chief, in case he tries to bolt. There's a nice long hank of rope on the ledge behind the lamp. Come on."

"Yes!" shouted Blent, still goaded by that same noisy excitement. "Come on! Come on, by all means. You're a newcomer hereabouts, Mister Government Spy. But these others have lived here always. They can tell you what's happening outside. They must have noticed the signs. If they weren't too excited. When a blizzard sets in, up in these hills, so early in the winter, and with all the signals that went with this one, it's due to keep up for anywhere from three to four days. Worse and worse all the time. It—"

"That's so," agreed Wayne, uneasily, speaking to Braden. "That's what I had in mind when I said we'd better be getting home. Then we saw this cuss climbing in here and I forgot—"

"You're dead right you forgot!" shrilled Blent, half beside himself. "Try to get down to Gusepple, now, in the dark, with no flashlights, and with the snow so thick you can't see six inches in front of you. Try not to miss the trail. Try not to fall over any of that swad of tricky cliffs that'll break your legs and maybe your necks. Try not to wander in the dark all over the mountainside till you freeze to death. It's down close to zero now, and it'll be below zero by morning."

"Shut up!" squalled Braden, shaken and sick.

"If you stay holed in up here," raged on Cæsar Blent, "what'll happen? That measly little stack of fuel will burn out in three hours, no matter how careful you tend the fire. Zero cold will fill this cave. No fire. No food. No water. And from anywhere from three to four days. How long will any of you stay alive? Now, maybe, you'll snicker some more at your good luck in catching an innocent man."

"You're as bad off as we are, Blent," muttered Chief Wayne, all the swagger gone out of him as he peered timorously into the thickening tempest. "So—"

"No, I'm not," contradicted Blent, suddenly casting aside his loud exaltation and speaking in a voice like the rasping of a rusty file. "No, I'm not, chief. I can get safe home, even with these foul handcuffs on, any time I want to. If you folks bar my way, I can wait till you're too froze or too starved to stop me. I'll outlast all of you. It's you three who'll die. Not me. It's you three who will go to sleep in the zero cold and not wake up. An hour after that I'll be sitting cozy by my own fire, cutting off these bracelets with a hacksaw and then cooking me some nice coffee and ham and eggs and then sleeping snug in my warm bed and

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smiling contented-like while I think of you up here, dead."

"Shut up!" screeched Braden, blubbering with pure terror. "Shut up or I'll blow a hole through you! We—"

"Hold on there, constable!" broke in Tice. "I got where I am in life by being able to judge human nature better than most. And, for all his bragging, this chap is telling the truth. Or he thinks he is, anyhow. Blent, if you can get yourself safe out of here, why can't you get us out, too?"

"Why should I?" asked Cæsar. "I'm not honing to go to prison for something I didn't do. If you three freeze, I'm safe. If I save you, I'm jailed. Don't be silly, Tice."

"If I promise to intercede for you at the trial, and tell how you helped us to—"

"I'll bargain with you for ten bushels of corn," interrupted Cæsar. "But I don't make dirty deals for my liberty. Not with a man who wouldn't keep his share of—"

"I swear—"

"Don't. Listen, the lot of you: I'm crazy for what I'm going to say. But I wouldn't see even three crooked cops die, if I could help it. I'll guarantee to get you to the State road, at the edge of Gusepple, if you'll do what I tell you to. Yes? No?"

THERE was a gabble of assent. All the officers were shaken of nerve by the prospect Blent had painted so mercilessly of the fate in store for them. The two local men recognized that all signs pointed to such a blizzard as Cæsar had foretold. More than once men had frozen to death in the Ramapos during such long-lasting zero storms.

"Good," said Blent. "First take off these handcuffs. Now," as the command was obeyed in almost servile haste, "one of you hand me that hank of rope up yonder. Thor has guided stray stock of mine safe home down the mountain, twice, nights as bad as this."

Tice ran to the rope on the lamp-ledge and thrust it into Cæsar's hand. Blent leaned over and tied one end of it to Thor's collar. He wound his own left wrist through it, a few inches beyond. Bidding the men to form in single file close behind him, each with a knot of the rope around his waist, Cæsar addressed the eager dog.

"Thor," he said, very slowly and distinctly, "*Home. Home!*"

Such a command had been familiar to the huge blackish wolfdog from puppyhood. He got to his feet and moved toward the entrance. Bothered by the need of moving so deliberately by reason of the four men tagging at the rope, the mongrel nevertheless set forth unswervingly on his journey.

"Follow close behind," Blent told the others. "Tread where he and I tread. I'll keep him at a walk. He knows the way. He'll skirt every cliff and he'll go around every boulder and windfall and he'll lead us safer than all the humans on earth could. So!"

At a snail's pace the quartet moved out into the night. The gale slashed them with armfuls of stinging snow. They were blinded and helpless in that roaring darkness. But they shuffled on, floundering, step by step, in the wake Thor's unerring leadership. Several times one or another of them barely escaped slipping down a cliff-edge. More than once they came to an irregular halt as the dog paused and consulted his weird canine instinct as to the route.

This for an eternity of time. Then, of a sudden, the men were walking

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again on level ground. The dog was moving forward with greater ease and assurance. Another five minutes and something hazily bright illumined the black murk and turned a wide spot in the swirl of snow to silver. Blent stopped.

He undid the knots from Thor's straining throat and from his own wrist.

"This is the State road," he said, raising his voice to be heard above the howl of the storm. "The electric lights will guide you the rest of the way. Gusepple post office is only a hundred yards ahead. The jail is another hundred yards. My farm is only a furlong —not that that can matter to me for another bunch of years. Cut loose from the rope, all of you. A baby could find his way from here on."

THE three officers did not answer. They drew into a huddle, while Cæsar Blent waited wonderingly, his hand laid in rough caress on Thor's head. Then Jared Tice spun around and faced him with a suddenness that made Thor snarl threateningly.

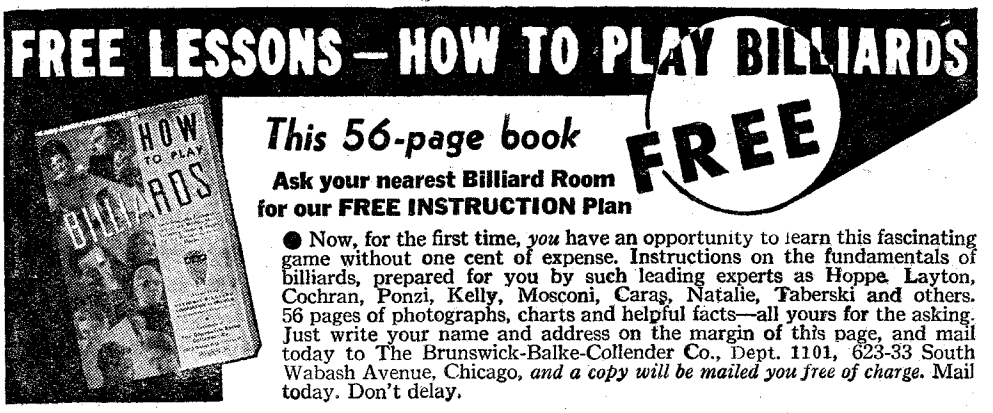
"Listen, you!" vociferated Tice, speaking as to a mortal enemy. "We three made our way down here from a trip up the mountain. We've just run across you on your way home from the store. Get that? We've got nothing on you. And we don't want any dealings with you. Chase back to your farm, you and that dog of yours. Go home and cook that coffee and ham and eggs and then go to sleep."

"No," refused Cæsar, "thanking you all the same. I'm going on with you to the jail. You say Coghlin and Struse are there. All I ask is that you send them into a room where Thor and I will be waiting for them. And I want you three to be listening through the barred transom at the top of the room's shut door. With Thor to throw the fear of death into them, I can sweat them into talking turkey and prove what I told you up in the cave."

An hour later the three were pump-handling the tired Blent. Chief Wayne, social arbiter of the township, was saying almost wistfully to him:

"We're giving a party over to my house next Wednesday. Come to it, won't you, Cæsar? All of us want to see a lot more of you than we've been seeing. And bring along that grand dog of yours!"

THE END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Forty Dead Men

By RALPH R. PERRY
Author of "The Rats of Mahia," "Blood Payment," etc.

Novelette

It was a terrible game that was played between an engineer walled in a dark mine and a desperate maniac guarding its entrance

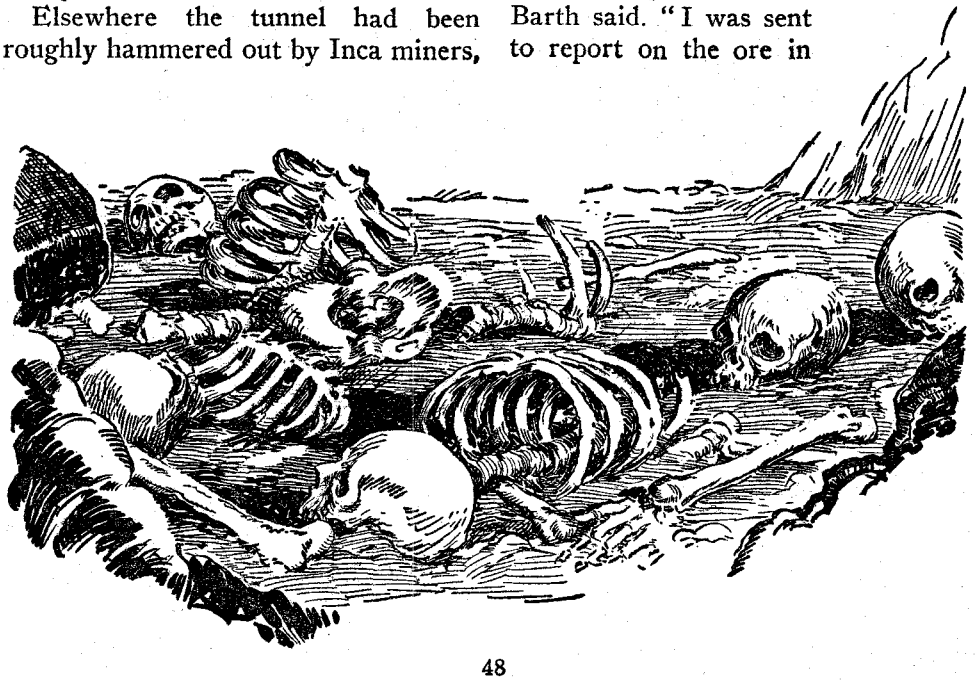
CHAPTER I.

SEÑOR ORTEGA—SUGGESTS.

DURING the years that the mine had been abandoned it seemed to have gathered darkness in its black heart. The candle in Ortega's lean fingers threw more shadows than light. Yet it revealed, a few feet beyond the two men, a narrow gap in the left hand side of the tunnel, like a window in what should have been solid, living rock.

Elsewhere the tunnel had been roughly hammered out by Inca miners, centuries dead. Around the opening the side was smooth. Opposite was a shallow cave, head high, as though the naked, brown-skinned miners had started another tunnel—or ripped out stone to build a wall. With a start, Barth realized that the smooth surface was masonry, built with mortar. Spanish work, that. The Incas didn't use mortar. And the masonry was where no masonry should be.

"Let us go on, *señor*," Barth said. "I was sent to report on the ore in



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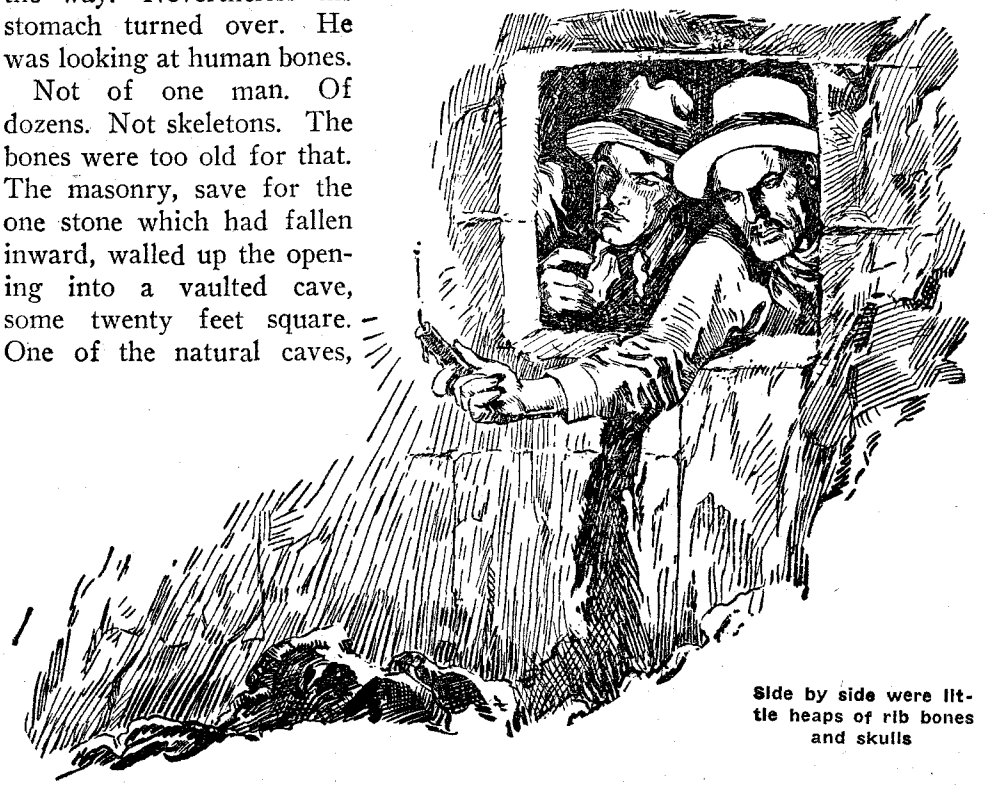
this mine. There can be none here."

"Yet that hole is important," whispered Ortega. He thrust the candle over Barth's shoulder. Along the sides of the tunnel the shadows fled. "Of your kindness, *señor Americano,* look first there."

Barth looked. Instinct warned him to expect something out of the way. Nevertheless his stomach turned over. He was looking at human bones.

Not of one man. Of dozens. Not skeletons. The bones were too old for that. The masonry, save for the one stone which had fallen inward, walled up the opening into a vaulted cave, some twenty feet square. One of the natural caves, or *llampera,* which the Incas soughto in their mining. Gold ore rich as jewelry had been hammered from those walls.



Side by side were little heaps of rib bones and skulls

In the flicker of the candle which Ortega thrust through the hole over his shoulder Barth could see the marks of the ancient tools.

Yet now, side by side all around the walls, were little heaps of rib bones. The skulls had rolled forward when the sinews rotted and lay scattered and jawless in the center. Nor was that the greatest horror of the sight. Stretching out from each little pile of ribs were the bones of legs and feet, on each side the bones of arms and hands. The bones lay as the dead had rotted, sitting side by side around that charnel house.

"The dead men!" whispered Ortega. "The forty dead men. They give the mine its local name, *señor.* The Mine of the Forty Dead Men." He rolled the Spanish phrase. "*La mina de los cuarenta hombres muertos!*"

Barth turned. Ortega stepped back. In his black eyes the flame of the candle was reflected like a dagger, point up.

"So what?" said Barth. "One of your ancestors, I take it, used this

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llampera for a grave after the ore was gone."

"Not so, *señor Americano*. Because the miners *said* the ore was gone, the first Ortega, whose name was Francesco, like mine—buried forty of them here alive. He was a determined man, *señor*, and he was right. For after that lesson, more gold was found."

"Where?"

"*Quien sabe?* I am not a mining engineer. Do not clench your fist, and scowl, *señor*. Do not misunderstand. I tell you an old tale. I suggest that you make use of an old tradition, known to none but the Ortegas and our neighbors here. By forty dead men Francesco Ortega found gold again in this mine. After he died there was a great earthquake, and the vein faulted and was lost. It could be found again, *señor*. I am sure of it."

"WHY?" said Barth. He was watching Ortega's eyes. The irises were jet-black, and showed a rim of white above the lower eyelid. The pupils were not the same size, and kept contracting and dilating, though the candle flame was steady. The man was not doped.

This idea of his would neither pass nor change.

"Because the first Francesco was the grandson of a Conquistador. To him many thousands of *pesos d'oro* were needful. Whereas I—" Ortega shrugged—"You have seen my lands, *señor*. What is left of them. Burned brown, stony, fit only to raise thistles to feed burros. To the Ortegas nothing is left but our pride, our hatreds, and this mine, *señor*. We have neighbors. The Cespedes." He spat with such suddenness and venom that Barth jumped. "They are besting us at last. Therefore it is necessary for us, the last Ortegas, to leave. Five thousand gold libras—a pittance, *señor*—will set me up as a planter beyond the Andes, where the wheat grows green and I can live well by the labor of my inferiors. As an Ortega should."

"Five thousand gold libras is twenty-five thousand dollars, American."

"*Es verdad,*" Ortega agreed. "*Señor,* the name of the mine alone is worth that to your employer. *La mina de los cuarenta hombres muertos!* The Mine of the Forty Dead Men, *señor!* There is a name to fire the imagination of an investor. Even—of an engineer. Inca gold, *señor,* that has been lost—but which the illustrious John Barth has found. If you report the gold is here five thousand libras is a pittance, *señor.*

"You understand? *Bueno!* Then I will wait above ground to hear what you will say."

With a quick gesture he thrust out the candle. Mechanically Barth lighted a second at its flame, taking a candle from the reserve supply stuck in his belt. Ortega turned and walked toward the shaft, where a rickety ladder mounted fifty feet to the sunbaked slope of the cordillera. He walked slowly, lean and straight backed, and the two candles sent long black shadows dancing crazily along the tunnel.

Barth let him go. The engineer had come alone to make this inspection. Ortega was at home. In the sunshine above ground his peons waited for him to reappear. He was safe, and he knew it. He had not needed to display a weapon. He was too proud now so much as to turn his head. He turned an angle in the tunnel. As his candle disappeared darkness seemed to close in around Barth. He understood that

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he had to deal with a paranoiac, a madman.

CHAPTER II.

THE FAULT IN THE VEIN.

JOHN BARTH knew ore. Throughout his twenty-eight years, indeed until this moment, that had seemed to him an adequate knowledge. He would have laughed, good-naturedly, if he had been called inexperienced. He had a feel for the dip of a vein through the hard rock, and for the potentialities of a mine, that amounted to a sixth sense. He could handle miners; he could speak Spanish and Quicha like a native. He knew Peru—the bare, brown country that was, and the more amazing, greener, richer land that had existed before the coming of the Spaniards.

Though he was American born, nine-tenths of his life had been lived in Peru, in the thin, cold air above the seven thousand foot level. Even his education at the Colorado School of Mines had scarcely been a change, except in latitude. Always he had lived among men, near a hole in the earth, for the purpose of blasting ore out of rock. Women were brown creatures that a savvy Yankee didn't take seriously, or often; or else the wives of engineers, to be shunned if they were middle-aged and motherly, and fled from if they were young, bored, and flirtatious. Engineering was neither enervating, nor treacherous. It filled Barth's life completely.

So perhaps it was no wonder that he could see further into the rock than most engineers, nor that he was in continual demand, at twenty-eight, to decide whether abandoned gold mines could be reopened and worked at a profit. He made his inspections alone, for to argue with another engineer annoyed him. He took his own samples, and did his own assaying.

Tall, brief-spoken, with straight brown hair that usually needed cutting and shy, rather reserved brown eyes; deep-chested from breathing thin mountain air, with a raggedly V-shaped white scar cut on his left cheek by a premature explosion which had occurred in his 'teens, he would appear at a property—sometimes, as in this case, after a day and night on horse back, during which he had camped beside the trail. It was his custom to order himself lowered down the shaft, alone, whether the mine had been abandoned ten years, or a hundred.

He carried candles to test for bad air. Otherwise his safety depended upon his judgment of rock, and his uncanny sense of direction amid the labyrinth of tunnels and shafts which might await him underground. Eventually he would submit a report:

"I cannot recommend purchase," or —"This mine contains about so many tons of ore that will average so much to the ton. I would recommend that development be made thus-and-so."

Never an explanation of how he had made his estimates. Just the conclusion, but upon those curt reports millions were spent—to discover, nine times out of ten, that John Barth had been right. He knew ore. When he learned that he had been right, he grunted. Meanwhile he had gone on to examine other mines.

He didn't know what else to do. He couldn't shrink up an income that averaged over twenty-five thousand a year. He couldn't get a kick out of gambling when he didn't really need money. He risked his life too frequently underground to get any thrill out of sports

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where there wouldn't even be a contest except for artificial rules, and any mining engineer in Peru has been rushed by a drugged or drunken native miner or two, swinging knife or sledge hammer.

Barth could handle weapons, and his fists. He was a thoroughly efficient engineer. Which, in the Mine of the Forty Dead Men, was not going to help him a bit. For the first time in his life he had no idea of the proper way to go about a job.

He couldn't very well have prevented Ortega from following. The man had climbed down the ladder after him . . . Barth shrugged impatiently. He was thinking like an old woman.

Five thousand gold libras—twenty-five thousand dollars—wasn't a vast sum of money. He could pay it. Or his principal could get it back by a stock-selling campaign among the gullible fools in North America who believe that because a mine has a romantic name and history it must hold ore . . . Barth scowled at himself. Those ideas were cowardly. And they had nothing to do with the problem Ortega had handed him.

He had been threatened. Ortega could make the threat good. So what?

THIS was a lonely, sparsely peopled district. That an engineer had been summoned to look at the mine would be known to every peon and Spaniard for miles around. His arrival that day had been an important event, even though he had merely swung out of the saddle in Ortega's patio, and gone to the mine. If he disappeared there would be an investigation . . . *mañana* . . . Barth smiled with a complete, bitter understanding of Peru. No use pursuing *that* speculation further.

He lifted his candle and walked down the tunnel toward the face where mining had ceased many, many years ago. After all, the mine might be valuable, even though Ortega didn't think so. Faulted veins were tricky things.

The marks of gunpowder soon appeared on the tunnel walls. There Inca labor had ceased. Beyond that point Spanish overlords had driven cowed, sullen men who had suddenly become slaves after gold. Barth walked on, one hundred, two hundred yards. Here was the fault. As plain, and almost as thin as a knife cut, the crack ran diagonally down the walls and straight across the floor and ceiling.

But—but what fools had continued to drive the tunnel straight ahead? Couldn't those old miners see? Barth took a miner's lantern from his pocket, and lighted it, but he scarcely needed the stronger illumination. A crystal of rock had reflected the candle-light, half way up one wall, and below it by some three feet, on the opposite side of the crack, was another crystal. Once those two had been in line. They were tiny, but to Barth's trained eyes the little gleams were plain as a beacon.

That crack was no real fault, but a mere earthquake crack in the rock. The strata were displaced not more than three feet, and straight downward. The lost vein was almost directly under his feet.

Barth smiled with slow, heartfelt relief. He strode to the foot of the shaft and shouted upward. In a moment the big head of Ortega's Quicha servant appeared against the sky.

"Lower the red canvas bag that is lying by the shaft to me," Barth ordered crisply. "And be careful, *hombre*. It holds dynamite."

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The big native scowled. "The *señor* Ortega is expecting you for dinner. He sent me to summon you —*Americano,*" he replied rudely.

"I will come later," said Barth—and the way he said it made the peon lower the red bag. Barth snatched out a drill and single jack, a stick of dynamite and fuse, and ran back to the fault. He drilled a little behind the crack. The rock was fairly soft. In twenty minutes he was capping his fuse and tamping his shot, lit it, and ran, taking refuge from flying rocks in the shallow niche opposite the cave of the the forty dead men.

There was a *boom-m-m.* A few stones rolled past him, and the sharp odor of powder filled the tunnel. Barth did not wait for the fumes to dissipate. The sight he expected was worth a headache.

He leaned over the V-shaped trench his shot had cracked in the tunnel floor—and shouted aloud.

Three feet down, almost to the inch, was a streak of quartz that gleamed with yellow. The vein was marvelously, incredibly rich. The streak of yellow was six inches wide, two inches thick — solid, free metal. Incredibly rich, incredible . . .

Slowly Barth's mouth closed. Like one who does not believe his eyes he bent closer. Gold is not found like that. He straightened, and for the first time in his mining experience he failed utterly to understand. The yellow streak was iron pyrites—fool's gold.

Sometimes, though very, very rarely, iron pyrites on the surface will point the way to a vein of gold below. But never, never in all the world does a gold vein change to pyrites. The Mine of the Forty Dead Men was not only worthless now. A tunnel had been hacked through the rock to follow a vein *which had never possessed any value!*

CHAPTER III.

DINNER—FOR ONE.

AMID the nitro fumes which sent sharp stabs of pain shooting through his head behind the eyes John Barth sat down to think over this astounding discovery. It was utterly at variance with the old records of the mine. He had read the yellowed parchments himself. So many arrobas of gold in this year. So many in that. There was no doubt about the authenticity of the documents. Because of them Barth's principal had sent him leagues across the dry and dusty plain to investigate this hole in the ground. The Mine of the Forty Dead Men had produced, and enormously.

But in God's name, how? From what? Barth couldn't figure it out. He couldn't decide what he was going to say to Francesco Ortega, either.

Dully he became aware of the voice of a Quicha woman, screaming down the shaft that he must come to dinner. At once, quickly . . . He rose and walked slowly down the tunnel, leaving his tools where they lay. From the foot of the shaft he caught a glimpse of a fat, brown woman's face, but when he climbed the ladder only the huge, scowling peon was in sight. A giant of a man, and as stupid and unreasonable as a llama.

"Does the *señor* want us all to miss our siesta?" he growled sullenly.

"Quien sabe?" Barth snapped. "Who was the woman?"

"My woman. The cook," the giant grumbled. He made an effort to reestablish his prestige. "My name is Topacara!"

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"So be it!" snapped Barth. He strode on, through the narrow gate in the adobe wall that surrounded the hacienda, and on into the patio where dusty flowers struggled for life. Among them was tethered his horse, saddled. A horse stabled in a drawing room in the States would have astonished Barth but little more. The patio of a Peruvian is his parlor.

He hesitated to enter the house unannounced. At that moment the pane behind the iron bars of a window swung back.

"*Señor,*" said a voice in pure-bred, cultivated Spanish, "*vaya con dios!* Go with God! There is your horse. Go quickly!"

It was a girl's voice. That, as much as the fact of the dismissal—the permission—made John Barth stare like an oaf. In the shadowy room behind the window bars he could see her only dimly, but the faint light touched hair of reddish gold. A *rubia,* one of the rare blondes of Spain, and young—too young to use that flat tone from which all emotion, all hope, had been burned.

Go? Instead an impulsive step took him to the window. He seized the bars. She was beautiful. A face of high cheek bones, broad, heart-shaped, and deathly pale. Eyes that widened at his advance, two small fists clenched at her young breasts. She did not retreat. The bars were between them. Only her head went back, her bosom lifted with a gesture of exhausted despair.

"I—do not understand," said Barth. "Who are you?"

"Dolores Ortega. Does that matter, *señor Americano del norte?* There is your horse. Go quickly. Or must I speak my brother's shame aloud?"

The tragedy in that pale, heart-shaped face gripped Barth.

"If I ran away I might be shamed," he replied in sonorous Spanish. The old-fashioned words and thought appealed to a grim sense of humor. He smiled dryly. "Even North Americans have honor. Of their own kind. Your brother Francesco did not seem to me like one who would change his mind. Therefore I do not understand."

In the pale face came a flush of quick anger. "He meant to kill you. Or you and he together would have stolen!" Dolores lashed out. "Not even to be rid of Juan Cespedes could I permit that!" The violet eyes shot fire. The mention of the Cespedes had called for venom in her brother. Here was hatred, and fear. "Is it not enough that our hospitality must stop at keeping a guest safe?" the girl flashed. "There is your horse, *señor! Madre de dios, vamos!* Go!"

"Or I might find the gold in the mine," said Barth sternly. He was watching her face. She exhibited no surprise. Only a quick lift of the head, as of hope; a lift of the shoulders, almost as quick, as hope changed to despair.

"You fired dynamite," she said. "Did you—"

"No," Barth retorted. "*Señorita,* why did your brother send you to your room and not mention you to me when I arrived, and why do you meet me in his place now?"

HE was stern. Her head lifted to meet force with force.

"Because," she replied through small, white teeth, "when you did not come to dinner he was impatient. We have waited long for your coming, *señor.* All of us. Even Juan Cespedes." Again that twist of the lips. She went on bitterly. "And so, *señor,* while he waited my brother asked me to pour him a glass of wine.

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I had a—certain drug. I put it in Francesco's glass. So now you know —*macho!*"

Macho is not a nice word. It means male. Figuratively, boor, or brute.

"Poison?" snapped Barth.

"Not so little. My brother only sleeps for a time. Now will you go?"

Barth's answer was to turn, lead his horse as far as the gate, and suddenly slap it on the haunches, so that it dashed through the opening. He walked back across the neglected garden, opened the door, which was unlocked, and confronted Dolores in the shadowy room.

"Your brother is not quite sane about the mine," he said. "If you awoke and found me gone you would pay heavily. A young girl does not interfere between men."

Dolores' hands had fallen to her sides. Her mouth was rebellious and bitter.

"But since you have gone so far I would like to see your brother. To disarm him. I shall not hurt him, either."

"God knows it!" retorted the sister impetuously. But whether she would have permitted him to take precautions or not Barth never learned. At that instant, surly as a suspicious watchdog, Topacara slid into the room from the interior of the house, leaving the door open behind him.

A lean, sinewy peon of middle age was at his heels, and behind them a brown-faced being that Barth thought at first was a dwarf. The shaggy black head was no higher than a tall man's elbow, though the spread of shoulder was enormous. A broad, vacant face with a slobbering mouth, a humped back—the third peon was a half-wit with tremendous physical strength.

He stared at Barth with a troubled, faintly hostile expression on his vacuous countenance. Topacara's eyes were for Dolores.

"My woman tells me the master sleeps," he growled. "Though it is time for the siesta he has not yet eaten." The peon made the statement an accusation.

"Go," said Dolores. "And take Juan and Poco with you. Poco looks angry. Go, I say, or I will speak to my brother when he wakes!"

Topacara folded his arms. His right hand glided under his belt sash.

BARTH

"When he wakes," he growled, "and finds you alone with an *Americano? Porca madona,* no!"

At the insult Barth leaped forward, before the knife could be drawn from the sash, and swung from the knee. His fist smacked on the unshaven jaw like a mallet. The jolt took Topacara off his feet, dropped him full length across the doorway. Poco's huge paw swung for the American's throat, missed as Barth's fist smashed into the vacant face, and closing on his shirt, ripped it from his body. With a backhanded swing at Juan, Barth shouldered through the door, slammed it behind him.

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He had a gun—in his saddle bag. Before he found that Poco would tear him in two. Unless Juan's knife found him first. He was in a corridor. Heavy doors of age-blackened wood on each side. Shut in. Trapped. He saw all that in a second, while the peons were stumbling over Topacara, pulling the door open. Dolores was screaming at them. Words were no good. Not from a woman.

IN a flash Barth made his choice, took his gamble. Four doors confronted him, but the plan of houses in Peru is much the same. Of the four he sprang toward the farthest, was through it as Poco burst into the corridor, shut it and shoved the wooden pin through the ancient, clumsy iron latch. He was in Francesco's room. The *señor* lay on a huge bed, eyes closed, mouth open, breathing in deep gasps. The room was bare as a cell. The bed, a chair, a wooden chest, a whip on the wall.

Barth snatched at that, hoping that the quirt was loaded. It wasn't. He hurled it in a corner, wasted a precious second trying to throw the lid of the chest back. Francesco must have a gun somewhere . . . The door shook and the wooden pin in the latch cracked as Poco threw his weight against it.

"With me, Poco! Together!" Topacara shouted, thickly, out of a daze.

Barth sprang to the bed, darted a hand beneath the pillow. Nothing there. Ortega's head rolled sidewise on a limp neck. He *must* have a gun . . . In his sash, then? Barth's fingers closed on a revolver butt as the door burst inward and Poco swayed toward him, huge hands like claws to tear out his throat.

Just time to shoot. As the half-wit lunged he saw the gun level. Even his dull mind recognized death. The slobber lips jerked, but the huge, misshapen body could not check its rush. It was the sudden grimace on the vacant, bestial face, like the fright of a child who sees too late that a stove is hot, that paralysed Barth's finger on the trigger. Instead of firing he snapped the revolver upward. The barrel struck Poco along the jaw.

The blow was vicious. A bullet could have snapped out consciousness no more suddenly. The body that hurtled into Barth was limp, senseless; but it knocked him backward upon the bed. The shaggy black head struck Barth's chin, dazing him. The revolver slipped from his fingers. Over the shoulder of the hunchback Topacara struck dazedly with a knife. The blade plunged deep into the mattress, missing Barth by an inch. He managed to seize the peon's forearm, tried to hold it until his head cleared, felt his fingers slip on the hairy brown skin, the knife cut into his shoulder as it was withdrawn, inch by inch.

Through the gray mist that swirled before Barth's eyes he caught the gleam of other steel. Juan was bending over him, too, hampered by the others, taking care lest a hasty thrust harm Ortega.

"Hurt him and Cespedes will send you to the garrote!" Dolores screamed. Juan's knife hung poised. Topacara ceased for an instant to tug at his blade. Perhaps he thought she meant, hurt Ortega. Perhaps she did.

"Give me your knife, Juan. Get the gun," the tall peon growled. As the weapon changed hands he touched Juan's throat with the point. "He was trying to kill the master," he snarled over his shoulder.

"You lie!" Dolores shrilled. "Hurt

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him and I go to Cespedes! By St. James I swear it!"

The eyes of the peon widened. He lifted the knife. "I shall tie him up, then, till the master wakes," he declared sullenly.

"Let him," said Barth.

"Can I prevent?" said Dolores with a bitter futility. "I did my best, *Americano*. You had your chance." She crossed the room to touch her brother's face. Topacara rolled Poco aside. Barth rose. Ortega still breathed, in long-drawn gasps. Once his eyelids fluttered. He was unhurt, even recovering rather rapidly from the effects of the drug. So intent were all four upon his condition that a cough at the door of the room made them all start, whirl.

A Peruvian stood in the doorway. A revolver in his hand, held with an affectation of carelessness, covered the two armed peons. His face was broad, the clean shaven jowls blue with the beard beneath the dark skin. His eyebrows made a straight, black bar. It was a hard, normally a brutal face, but the man was smiling now.

"Speak of the devil . . ." he suggested sardonically. "I am sure I heard an Ortega call for me. I expected to find you all taking your siesta, but"—black eyes flashed to the drugged man on the bed and to Barth's bleeding shoulder—"this is better. Drop that knife! And that gun, you dogs!"

The weapons clattered on the floor.

"You dare to come here unbidden? And armed?" Dolores demanded.

"Why not?" The blue-jowled mouth curled sardonically. "Is it not a proverb? 'The Ortegas have, but the Cespedes must take?' When an American arrives to turn the Forty Dead Men into gold again, it was time to come. Provided I brought my own key to your door."

Juan Cespedes spun the revolver by the trigger guard. After a whirling flash of blued steel, it covered them all.

CHAPTER IV.

"ES VERDAD!"

HE had not invaded the house alone. Two peons, both with drawn knives, crowded through the door. One gathered up the weapons on the floor. At a word from Cespedes, the second, who was a skinny little man, bound the hands of Topacara and Juan and gave them a push toward the door, remaining himself to stand guard over Ortega and Poco. Cespedes motioned the others to walk down the corridor to the large, shadowy room, covering them negligently with his revolver.

The fight, however, had been taken out of Topacara. He backed against the wall as far from the Peruvian as he could get. Juan seemed to shrink into his skin. From middle-aged, he became old. The other peon eyed them somberly. Dolores leaned against the back of a chair, silent, white, Cespedes seated himself with the revolver across his knees. He had made no move to bind Barth.

Now he motioned the American to a chair. Barth, seating himself, could sense a rush of emotion through the room, as darkness seems to rush inward upon an extinguished candle. Cespedes was guilty of armed invasion of a neighbor's house, and yet though Dolores and Topacara were shocked, and in their own way terrified, neither was surprised. It was Cespedes who seemed at a loss, despite his fixed, sardonic smile.

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"Francesco will kill you," Dolores whispered—hopefully.

"'An Ortega dreads poverty worse than other men fear death,'" Cespedes quoted with a lift of the lip. "Is it not so, American?"

"Meaning what?"

"Ah. You are not familiar with our local proverbs? Or our local feuds. The first Ortega was a *caballero.* The first Cespedes, a mere foot soldier—"

"Gentlemen and scum still!" whispered Dolores.

"*Quien sabe?* We may change that," said Cespedes blandly. "However, *señor—la mina re los cuarenta hombres muertos*—it is an odd mine, not so?"

Barth's face was wooden.

"It's value—after all, you had fought for your life, *señor,* and you had not won—arises from odd circumstances?"

"Very odd," Barth admitted. "But I would like to know how you know that. And how you happened to arrive here."

"Happened?" Thin lips curled sardonically. "But I was watching for you as vigilantly as Francesco! And even so I was nearly too late . . . you are free to go, *señor.*"

"Go?" Barth half rose from his chair—and sat down. "Why?"

"Because I do not wish Ortega to have four thousand gold libras."

"Four? But it was five he wa—"

Barth stopped short. Cespedes' smile widened, a little.

"Ah, it was five he asked? One thousand for profit. How like an Ortega! Yet it is only four that he owes me. And I do not wish that he pay."

"You lie, *macho!* My brother owes you nothing. He would not—"

The words were torn from Dolores, but Topacara seemed to shrink. The brown face was suddenly gray, as though the fingers of death were pinching the cheeks. Juan groaned aloud.

CESPEDES only lifted the revolver—a little.

"*Señor Americano,* watch those two. Listen. Then you may tell me if I lie. Once there was a mine here which produced much gold. It had an Inca name which every one has forgotten—"

"Huayna Paccari," Barth interjected, remembering the name written in ancient yellow parchments.

"So? Thank you, *señor.* At least *I* had forgotten," Cespedes continued blandly. "However, a day came when in the smelters the gold was found no longer, and for an Ortega to have no gold is worse than death to common men."

"And so the first Ortega took some of his miners underground. Thereafter, *señor,* the name of the mine was the Forty Dead Men. A little while afterward it began to produce gold again, though not so much as before. Because"—Cespedes paused and in a prolonged, grim silence the last vestige of color drained from Dolores' face—"because, rather than be buried alive themselves, such miners as had survived smuggled gold into the mine from a hidden Inca store. They broke the thin plates of gold from an Inca temple, *señor,* and dropped the bits of gold into the worthless rock.

"What else could they do with an Ortega ready to entomb them? But when the temple stores were exhausted the mine could produce no more, and even an Ortega knew it! Therefore there are only forty skeletons in that chamber. And therefore the mine has not been worked all these years."

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Cespedes leaped up. "Look at their faces, *señor!*" He shouted. "Ask them! Was not the mine salted by poor devils who preferred to betray the secrets of their race to death!"

Barth turned to Dolores. The eyes of the girl were enormous, smudged with dark shadows.

"*Es verdad,*" she smiled. "It is true. . . . the Forty Dead brought us nothing . . . but stolen gold . . . it is our

DOLORES ORTEGA

shame . . . but not even that Francesco Ortega would have harmed a guest!"

"Forget it," said Barth. He cursed himself silently because the speech was rough. Dolores had too much courage to be humilitated in this way. Cespedes' sardonic smile infuriated him. "I've a question or two to ask yet. For instance, this matter of the four—or five—*libras de oro.*"

"That? Oh, an Ortega may gamble with a Cespedes. And lose. And double the stakes and lose again. And keep on doubling and losing until the sum is preposterous to play for, since it is four times what his barren lands and salted mine is worth," Cespedes retorted nastily. "He had to pay in some way. He tried first to pay me with a bullet fired from the chaparral. He missed—but the bullet killed the peon riding beside me. The brother of José, here." He gestured toward the lean peon behind him. His revolver shifted to cover Topacara. "As you knew well, son of a dog!" he snarled. "You knew, and he knew that we found the trail in the chaparral. I could have sent you both to the garrote—if this were not a lonely land. To get a rurale here would take a week. I preferred to act myself. Did I not send a message to your master, son of a pig? Did I not say, 'In three months pay me, or settle the debt?'"

"*Si!*" Topacara assented, gray-faced.

"It was not money tricked or tortured from a Yankee engineer that I wanted," Cespedes declared with a sarcasm that made Barth clench his fists. "I knew what he was up to when he sent the old records of the mine away. It was all he could do, for I have not ridden lonely trails lately. If I had stayed at home today—*quien sabe?* I would have had my gold, I think."

"But you wanted me," said Dolores suddenly. "Though I spit at you and would not marry you of free will."

"*Es verdad,*" said Cespedes. He was no longer smiling. His voice had deepened. "I want you more than life. There may be another bullet from the chaparral. Later. I do not care. I do not care even if you hate me, at first."

IN the silence that gripped the shadowy room all five became aware of a faint *bump—bump—bump* in the corridor outside the door. It was the sound of a box being pushed, very cautiously, along the uneven stone floor. The door swung in-

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ward. Cespedes leaped up, the revolver swung above his shoulder for a snap shot. José slipped out his knife. Into the room toppled a lean body to lie sprawled on its back across the threshold.

It was Cespedes' peon guard. The face was blue. Around the throat was wrapped the silk sash that Ortega had worn. Easy to guess what had happened the bed room! A peon, bending carelessly over an enemy whom he believed to be still under the influence of a drug. A swift movement that slipped the band of silk around the throat, a quick step behind the guard, out of reach of his knife—and afterward, the relentless pressure of that improvised garrote, till death came without a sound.

Cespedes crouched. But though Ortega must be in the corridor, must have carried the peon in his arms to toss contemptuously at his enemy, the heavy door still shielded him from view. Something bumped and scraped along the flagging. Inch by inch a wooden box was pushed into sight. It was painted red. The lid was thrown back. Within was a brownish black powder. Blasting powder. The yellow, paper-wrapped cylinders of the blasting cartridges, a few of which had been broken open to sprinkle the loose powder thickly, filled the box three-quarters full.

Cespedes snapped a shot into the door.

"Think twice, amigo!" Ortega called derisively. Around the edge of the door came a cheroot, the end recently puffed to a red glow. It was held directly over the box, and not a foot above it. If even the tiniest spark should fall—

"*Dios, hombre!* Your sister!" Cespedes exclaimed in a choking gasp.

"Think of her yourself," snarled Ortega. "She means more to you thon to me—since she turned against me for a Yankee pig. Do not move, Dolores!"

Barth saw that the girl could not move. Neither could he. He could only watch the tip of that thin cigar. A film of gray ash was forming. If it fell, would it be hot enough to explode the powder? He didn't know.

"Toss your revolver into the corridor. Not too far," Ortega said. "You know me, Cespedes . . . Now!"

The revolver clattered on the stone flagging. Cespedes tottered back against the wall. His mouth was a square of horror, half open. The sinews of his neck were cords. All that could be seen of Ortega were the tips of two brown fingers, and the cigar.

"Take José's knife, Topacara," said Ortega. Long seconds passed before the peon could move. He fumbled for the blade, though José's made no resistance. Neither could tear his eyes from the box. Topacara's announcement that he had the blade was a croak.

Instantly Ortega leaped from behind the door, snatching up the revolver. With long strides he was in the room, walking straight toward Cespedes. The revolver was flung up—and fell with a sickening crunch on the Peruvian's bare head. He crumpled at the foot of the wall. Ortega strode toward José The peon never raised a hand—only moaned as the steel barrel rose; slid to the floor without a groan as it fell. Barth couldn't move. He would be shot before he made a step, as the others would have been shot. Yet that didn't hold him back. He expected to be struck down next. The mad rage on Ortega's face paralyzed him. The man whirled.

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"To your room, wench!" he snarled at his sister.

"No!" Dolores whispered.

"No?" It was not a smile on Ortega's face. Only the line of his lips that widened. "You wish to see? *Bueno!* Out, the two of you! To the mine."

Barth turned on his heel. He had some dim idea of going first, whirling outside the doorway. But every muscle was knotted, tense in anticipation of the shock of a bullet. He stepped into the patio, with Dolores crowding so closely behind him that to turn would have been madness. Except for a single moan, one whispered refusal, the girl had made no sound.

At the rotten coping which protected the mine shaft she stopped and faced about. So did Barth. Ortega was about ten feet away.

"You can kill me," Dolores said. "I will not be whipped."

"That is as I decide. Climb down," Ortega retored. "Down into the Mine of the Forty Dead. No, not you, *Americano.* I want you here, for a time."

"Go!" Barth whispered. He caught the girl's shoulder, steadied her so that her feet could find the rotten rungs of the ladder. Without that touch she was in a condition to step blindly into the pit. She looked at him—not as a person, but as a companion in desperation. Slowly, falteringly, the head of reddish gold disappeared below the earth.

More gold, driven into the mine by the fear of death? The idea flashed through Barth's brain. He shook his head to clear it. The revolver was pointed at his belt buckle.

"I would like to kill you," said Ortega, quietly. "But—"

He passed his hand swiftly across his face, as though to brush away a mist. "But that would be only—pleasure. I did not even kill those pigs that attacked my house. Though I had a right to kill them. Have I not?"

"Quien sabe?" Barth answered. He was waiting for the black eyes with the dancing lights in their depths to waver, to shift. But the muzzle of the gun was no more unwinking.

"And you! The mine is worth five thousand gold libras, no?"

"To me? Yes."

"Then write your report!"

"Here? With what?" demanded Barth. If Ortega would only let him walk back, let him open his saddle bag. His own gun lay next to the writing case . . .

The unwinking black eyes above the gun narrowed craftily. "The writing will take time, and *I* am no fool, to neglect men who seem unconscious. Climb down into the mine, *Americano.* 'A knife to kill—but a prison to hold a man,'" Ortega quoted grimly. "When I finish with the others I shall send you pen and ink."

He shouted for Topacara to come and guard the shaft. Barth, climbing down the ladder, saw nothing but darkness below, and no hope anywhere.

CHAPTER V.

SHORT FUSE.

DOLORES was sitting on the floor of the tunnel. Her back was against the masonry that walled the Cave of the Forty Dead. The last glimmer of light from the shaft barely reached her, caught on a red-gold head thrown back against the rough stone, the curve of a slim throat. She was brooding. Her head did not move, and Barth brushed past her without speak-

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ing—to return with a few candles, a few sticks of dynamite, a single jack and a length of fuse from his roll of mining tools.

He dropped the hammer, grunted with a sudden thought, and went back again, to return with a ball of thin, strong twine which had guided him through the mazes of many mines. He lit the candle. Dolores' eyes were half open. Still she did not speak.

Swiftly Barth cut off an inch or two of fuse, and lit it at the candle. He experimented, each fuse hissing softly on the tunnel floor, until he found the length that burned just five seconds. Three of these he cut, and set into crimped and capped sticks of dynamite. A fourth fuse was much longer.

"*Como?*" Dolores whispered. "Why, *señor*—"

"Barth. John Barth's my name," he said, answering her pause. "Why these little home-made bombs? Because of the way I'm made, I guess. I don't want to die down here like a hog-tied steer. I've been thinking."

"But why, Jo-hon?" She made two syllables of the name. It was almost, though not quite, "Juan." "I found the hole you made. Even in the dark I could feel the vein. So wide . . . why did you tell me you had found nothing? Were you the *Americano del norte,* who must bargain?"

"With a light you would have seen the vein was fool's gold," said Barth quietly. "And so would Ortega. No, the vein is out, Dolores. It is really true the mine was salted, once the gold in that *llampera* behind you was gone."

She nodded, with a slight shudder. "But we never believed it. Not really. Not even the Cespedes really believed it. Always there was hope that gold would be found in the mine again, somehow . . . by some one. To live in the past too much is not good, Jo-hon . . . Or the future . . . That is not good, either . . . But we Ortegas have always despised the present . . . Until now." Her lips parted. "I, too, have been thinking."

"I used to think it was enough to be a good mining engineer. I was a damn fool." Barth's tone was reflective, not rough. "I've just about wasted twenty-nine years. *And* so, since I can't see how Ortega can permit me to live, I've fixed these." He picked up the sticks of dynamite, and slipped the ball of twine into his pocket.

The red-gold head leaned forward. Eyes that were like dark pools in the candle-light looked up at Barth.

"THIS is an evil place. Always *la mina de los cuarenta muertos* has been evil. And yet it was all there was. For my brother. For me. Yes, and for Cespedes, too." She spoke with a direct simplicity that made Barth hold his breath. "Three people in a lonely, brown land. And in the midst a dark hole, Jo-hon. A hole that led to death and trickery.

"I will live—afterward," she went on. "My brother will beat me, and take me away with him. I shall stay with him, because I know he is a little mad. Yet for me, too, this is the end, Jo-hon. For I must live with a secret that I cannot confess to a priest, and I cannot go to any man with guilt on my soul. You think that is not true, or that it is strange, perhaps."

"No," said Barth. He knew Peru, and the power of a religious faith devoutly and implicitly believed.

"So I would like to know how you can use your little bombs in this hole," Dolores demanded. "Since I have reached the end, too. I, who, never really lived, until this afternoon."

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"Why, I'm going to climb the ladder. With some excuse, probably to ask if you may come out," Barth explained uneasily. "Topacara's not a fast thinker. He'll let me up."

"Yes."

"I'll tie one end of the twine to the bottom of the ladder before I start, and drop the ball through the topmost round. The twine is so thin it won't be noticed in the shadows. I'll come down—but I shall have left the twine fixed so that I can hoist one of my little bombs to the top of the shaft quickly. It will explode almost at the feet of any one leaning over the top of the shaft. Of course it may blow down the ladders, too, but if Ortega were—er—incapacitated, even temporarily, I think Topacara would let us out of here."

"You would murder my brother. By a trick," said Dolores. Her hand pushed against Barth's chest as he leaned forward. "Yes . . . I know. He is a little mad. You would kill him to save three lives. Yet I do not like that. I—shall not permit it."

"What else?" growled Barth. Her hand was on his arm, lightly. A pulse was hammering in his throat, and the scar on his cheek was red. Permit it? She could not prevent it. One blow would stretch her senseless.

"*Quien sabe?*" she whispered. She read his thought in his eyes, and did not flinch. "Yet it is an evil trick, Jo-hon. Evil like this mine . . . and even my brother who is a little mad has acted like a man. He did not kill Cespedes. He has murdered no one, yet. And"—the fingers against Barth's chest trembled; despite his anger the girl's wide, shadowy eyes seemed to draw him in, to wrap him warmly—"when you drove your horse through the gate I loved you, Jo-hon, because you were a caballero. Cespedes also acted the man. But I hate him."

"Really?"

"*Si,*" Dolores insisted with a simplicity that made Barth ashamed of his harshness. "He is *macho*. A brute. Only at the last, when he tossed down his gun, I could not hate him. I knew I was first, not in fine speeches, but in deeds, Jo-hon. Twice in an afternoon it happened, and I would not blot out that memory by a bloody—trick."

"You're a romantic kid," Barth grumbled.

She looked at him. Only that. He turned his head. Her heart and soul were in her eyes—a clean, brave soul that swept subterfuge aside.

"In an afternoon I have learned what is worth while," she said. "Not gold, Jo-hon. Not even life without respect, and courage. And so"—she rose, and he came to his feet with her—"if you dare to wait and fight Francesco fairly I shall understand, Jo-hon. Even though you kill him. But I will not permit a trick."

She was turning.

"Where are you going?"

"Up the ladder. To tell Francesco that you can be trusted. That you will do what you promise, like a caballero."

"And that I've been making bombs?"

"No!" Dolores flashed. "Or—yes! Can I go then, *macho?*"

BARTH nodded. A little curtly. His mind was telling him that Ortega should be blown to bits like a mad dog, but all he could see was a reddish-gold head, and a light that suddenly flashed in shadowy eyes like a gleam from the heart of a gem. Suddenly Dolores was in his arms—so quickly, so swift to break away, that his arms did not close around her. Only the touch of her forehead against

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his chest, the pressure of a soft body that quivered uncontrollably, and she was running up the dark tunnel with her shadow growing fantastically before her. She turned.

"*Hasta luego,* Jo-hon!" she whispered. "Speed our meeting . . ."

He heard the old wooden ladder creak as she began to mount.

Silence followed. Topacara, therefore, must have permitted the girl to emerge unchallenged; but Barth was so far underground that he could hear nothing after she was out of the shaft. He imagined that she cried out once, as though Ortega had struck her. Yet that was imagination only. For minutes, many minutes, he sat staring at the candle. Then the ladder creaked again.

Instantly Barth was on his feet, the short-fused sticks of dynamite concealed handily in the rags of his shirt, and the candle in his hand. To his consternation, down the shaft advanced the squat figure and slobber face of Poco. The dim-wit halted uncertainly.

"You are not angry, *señor?*" he muttered. "The master said come . . ."

Barth stepped forward eagerly, but the other shook his big head.

"Not you, *señor. I* must come . . . down," he said. From his sash he took papers, and a fountain pen that had been in Barth's baggage. He handed the American a note:

> I have seen copies of your mining reports. So try no tricks. On the price I have changed my mind. Write that the mine is worth a hundred thousand dollars. Then I can be beaten down in the bargain, and sell quickly for five thousand libras.

Barth nodded to himself. The reasoning was sound. He made out one of his characteristically brief reports. Signed it. In every respect the document was genuine.

On another sheet of paper he wrote a sight draft on his own bank for five thousand libras.

"Tell your master," he instructed Poco, "that he can use either of these. Or if he wants to double-cross me, both. But I prefer to pay for my own mistakes. I'd rather that he cashed the draft."

"That he cashed the draft," Poco

ORTEGA

parroted. He climbed the ladder—and was back so quickly that Barth started. There had barely been time for him to hand the papers to Ortega, and instead of advancing toward Barth, Poco halted at the bottom of the shaft and stared upward.

Ropes creaked. There was a muttering of voices on the surface—and from above the limp figure of Cespedes was lowered, swaying and twisting on the rope. For an instant the shadows danced so that Barth thought the Peruvian was hanged. But though he was bound hand and foot, the rope was only beneath his arms. Methodically Poco released him. The rope was snatched upward. One after the other, Cespedes'

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peons were lowered. Limp, bound, but still alive.

Poco lifted Cespedes in his arms. "*Señor Americano,*" he called along the tunnel, "you will not kill me? I do what I am told . . . only that!"

"*Como* no?" Barth retorted. He was fingering a stick of dynamite, hesitating mostly on Cespedes' account. "Why not?"

"Because the master and Topacara have damp straw near the top," Poco grumbled. "They will light it and toss it down. Can a man breathe smoke, *señor?*"

"Not long," Barth admitted. "Do as you were told, then."

"Thanks, *señor!*" Poco muttered. He seemed immensely relieved. And still uncertain. Barth didn't understand that, though he sensed that deviltry was afoot. Poco carried Cespedes to the hole in the masonry wall, pulled out a loose stone to enlarge the gap, and thrust the unconscious man head first into the chamber of the Forty Dead. The peons were tumbled after their master. When the task was done Poco wheeled to face Barth. Sweat beaded the brutish face. The huge hands trembled.

"I was told . . . to put you in, too," he muttered.

"The hell you will!" Barth retorted.

"*Si,*" Poco answered with dull resignation. "The master knows you have dynamite here, *señor.* I cannot fight dynamite, or a bullet. Me, I shall sit down and wait with you . . . for the smoke. Shall we smoke a cigarette together while we wait, *señor? Como* no?"

The squat figured hankered down against the tunnel wall. The huge fingers busied themselves with a corn husk and tobacco, but they trembled so that the tobacco spilled. On Poco's forehead the beads of sweat ran together and rolled down his temples.

Barth scowled. To attempt to climb a fifty foot ladder in the face of a gun was utter madness. The futility of killing Poco made him swear aloud. Ortega was double crossing him. And Ortega, with the cunning of monomania, was sending a peon to do the dirty work and run the risk. Poco's life meant exactly nothing. He was a mere pair of hands.

"And if I go to join the Forty Dead, what then?" Barth demanded.

"Then I was to call to Topacara for mortar and build up the wall," Poco said. "I know you will not do it, *señor. Carramba!* To breathe smoke is better than that!"

"But I will do it," Barth said. He put the candle on the floor and squirmed lithely through the hole. He tumbled upon the three unconscious bodies. As he rolled from the heap a skull, brittle with age, crushed under his weight.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FORTY—AND FOUR.

THE sound, the jab of the sharp edges of bone into his back, made Barth shiver. The horror that would close around him if he failed, the horror that must close around him for a time even if he succeeded, was pressing against his flesh. Yet in an instant he was up, looking through the gap in the wall at Poco's round mouth and gaping eyes.

The peon was thunderstruck. Small wonder! Even to Barth the idea, the necessity for the move, had come like a flash. It was grim irony that just as he should have learned the value and importance of human contacts he

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should be forced by Ortega's cunning to act like the old John Barth — the engineer who knew rock and mines and men, and cared for nothing else.

Yet in this dark and bone-strewn hole there was nothing else. The mine. The Mine of the Forty Dead, which had been the master-fact in all this territory and to all these people for generations, was the most important thing to Barth. Without its sinister tradition Ortega would not have stooped to extortion and murder, and even yet —as his refusal to accept Barth's check proved—it was the mine that Ortega relied upon to yield him his desires. He believed in the mine, and in slow, horrible death to enforce his will upon any man who dared to oppose him.

"Ortega is too suspicious, Poco," said Barth slowly. His voice shook. Under one foot a bone was crunching beneath his weight. It was a terrible game that must be played out now between an engineer walled in darkness and a desperate paranoiac pacing back and forth in the sunlight, biting his nails, frantic with worry over what was happening fifty feet underground. A game to be played through the dim wits of an illiterate peon.

"Ortega thinks my report and my check will be worthless if I am alive to countermand them, not so?" The thought was too complicated for Poco to follow. His forehead wrinkled. "Never mind, *hombre*," Barth added. "When your work is done walk down the tunnel and look in the hole that I blew. *Quien sabe, hombre?* Even an Ortega can be—mistaken."

"The master said nothing about that," Poco muttered. But his forehead smoothed. "He said come back to the shaft and shout for mortar."

"Then shout!" snapped Barth. While Poco walked away he dragged the three unconscious men as far from the masonry wall as the limits of the chamber would permit. Cespedes he placed against the living rock, the two peons above him, the faces of all turned toward the wall. On hands and knees Barth scraped the floor of the chamber for dust.

The dust of forty dead men He managed to fill his cupped hands before the light of the candle, returning, gilded the rough edges of the aperture in the masonry wall.

Poco found Barth leaning out of the gap, as before. The side of the bucket of mortar, the trowel, made the sweat run down the engineer's face. He could not stand and watch that hole closed before his eyes. But he would have to. He did. Poco pulled off a few loose stones.

He slapped a thick coating of mortar on the solid structure beneath, picked up a stone, hesitated, and laid the stone down. He could not look straight at Barth's face.

"*Señor*," he muttered, "if you had shot me back there—"

"Topacara would be building the wall. And Topacara and not you would tell Ortega about the vein. Get busy."

"Vein? *Si, señor*. Of course, that is true. Topacara, and not Poco. Yet, between us two, *señor* . . . I can make a gift too, no?"

He fumbled in his sash. Quickly, never raising his eyes, as if afraid that Ortega might see, he thrust a stub of a candle and a knife into Barth's hands. "Steel is kinder than the dark, *señor*," he muttered—and thumped the stone onto the mortar. He worked quickly. Soon the candle-light outside gleamed through narrow chinks. These closed —and with a gulp Barth knelt and lighted his bit of candle. He had be-

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lieved that he had nerved himself against the dark, and yet, as the match flared he realized that only Poco's candle had prevented him from beating madly at the freshly laid masonry with his bare fists. On such trifles hinge life and death. As the wick caught fire he put his ear against the wall. He heard Poco trudge up the tunnel, toward the vein. A moment's wait—and then the footsteps returned, more swiftly.

The first glance at that vein had made Barth gasp. To an ignorant peon the shining yellow ore would look like wealth incalculable. He would carry a rambling incoherent report to Ortega. Barth had told Dolores the ore was worthless. Had she passed the news to her brother.

Would Ortega believe her, or anything except the evidence of his own eyes, about the mine which was all important to him?

THAT was to be decided. An event that Barth must wait for, while a stub of candle burned lower and lower in air that grew thicker with each slow breath. Because forty men had died here once, Ortega would believe that four more must die. He would believe that Barth was imprisoned hopelessly behind a thick stone wall.

So why should Ortega hesitate to descend?

Barth grinned crookedly. He shoved a stick of dynamite into the fresh mortar and tamped it with the dust he had scraped from the floor. He was skilful with powder. Nevertheless, the chamber was so small that the air-concussion that would be caused by the explosion would be almost sure to stun him, even if he were not killed outright. He placed that stick of dynamite as a last resort. It would bring oblivion more quickly than Poco's knife.

He crouched, his ear against the stone. The air was very thick. He was panting. He tried to make no sound. Ortega wore thin-soled shoes, not heavy sandals like Poco. Only the faintest scuff of leather against stone would be audible. A vibration transmitted through the wall, rather than a noise. A vibration . . . that he heard! Or felt.

Some one was walking slowly down the tunnel. It *must* be Ortega—and yet because everything hinged on that fact Barth clenched his teeth because he could not possibly be certain until too late. As the footsteps passed him he began to count. One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five. Five paces. Fifteen feet beyond the walled chamber. Like lightning Barth stooped. Snatched the candle and jammed it into the fresh mortar. Put both hands on the largest stone in the new-laid masonry and pushed with all his strength.

The stone moved. The mortar had not yet set. The wall bulged. The stone thumped outward into the tunnel, followed by a shower of smaller rocks.

"Caraho!" snarled Ortega. He made one step backward. His shadow, vast in the candle-light, was flung on the opposite wall. Barth could see the arm, upraised with the revolver for a snap-shot. He gripped two sticks of dynamite, holding them side by side, the brief fuses close to the candle flame—which cast the shadow of his own hand on the tunnel wall opposite. Though the two men were not in each other's side, each could follow every movement of the other.

"The Forty could have done that. Long ago," said Barth curtly. "But

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they believed that things end, and so they died. We four—await your answer, *señor!*"

"Four? One!" Ortega spat. "One Yankee dog!" His shadow shifted. With a puff of breath he blew out his candle. There was a quick footfall as he rushed. Barth lit the fuses. The dynamite left twin arcs of flashing sparks as he cast the sticks into the tunnel.

He smashed his candle out with the flat of his hand as the rock heaved under his feet with the crash of the explosion.

The concussion sent him staggering back, shielded by the wall though he was. He recovered himself, sprang forward, tore what was left of the stones from the damp mortar, tumbled into the tunnel. In the gloom he could just see Ortega. The explosion had hurled the Peruvian backward and torn half the clothing from his body. He was rising to his knees, one arm pressed against his eyes—but even in that tearing blast of flame he had clung to his gun. He fired blindly as Barth charged, missed and fired again as Barth dove for his throat. The second bullet gouged Barth's leg from thigh to knee.

THEN his flying body knocked Ortega prone. They rolled on the stone, the gun beneath them, Barth's left hand clutched the barrel of the gun. He jerked the barrel upward, against Ortega's chin, locked his legs around the other man's, and drove the point of his right elbow in savage jabs against Ortega's neck.

The man was wiry as a cat. He squirmed sidewise. Barth had to strike with his fist for the back of the neck. That rabbit punch would have been a clean knockout, except that it landed too high on Ortega's skull. The blow dazed the man. His twisting was suddenly less violent. As Barth's fist rose again he knew that the next blow would end the fight. Knew, too, that Otrega was also aware of it by the telepathy that passes between men locked in close grip.

There was a muffled report. A jerk of the sinewy body. Ortega had pulled the trigger of a revolver jammed against his under jaw.

The punch that was to have knocked him senseless struck now a man already dead.

Barth pulled the revolver from limp fingers and stood up. It was dark, a twilight that was almost black in the Mine of the Forty Dead. He stepped on the candle that Ortega had dropped, but he had no heart to light it, or to turn Ortega over and see a bullet-shattered face. Slowly, more conscious of the dynamite fumes than of his own wound, he trudged to the bottom of the shaft.

Two heads peered over the edge. One dark, one reddish-gold.

"*Quien es? Madre de dios,* who is it?" Dolores whispered.

"Barth," he said. "Your brother fought to the bitter end. I am sorry."

Dolores made the sign of the Cross. She raised her head to glance briefly at the brown hills, far away across a sun-baked land, and looked down again into the gloom of the Mine of the Forty Dead—and One.

"That was his way. Not yours. Nor your fault, Jo-hon," she said steadily. Topacara had stepped back. Only the red-gold head was bowed over the shaft.

John Barth climbed slowly upward, toward the sunlight, and a beginning.

THE END

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With the speed of an express train the buffalo charged

Captain Long Knife

By F. V. W. MASON

Caught between murderous whites and hostile Indians, Captain Robert Burton prepares to sell his life dearly

THIS STORY HAS JUST BEGUN—START IT NOW

IT was not long after the close of the Civil War, when the Union Pacific Railroad was driving its rails westward through Nebraska, that Robert Burton, ex-Confederate captain, and his friend Colin MacKaye, were passengers on a train that was wrecked and raided by marauding Cheyenne Indians.

Burton, who had just returned from mercenary soldiering in Mexico, was heading for Julesburg, where his sweetheart, Enid Culver, was awaiting him.

In the train wreck, most of the passengers and crew were killed. Burton and MacKaye escaped, with a few others, and Burton saved the life of Jessica Valcour, daughter of Senator Valcour, promoter of the railroad.

When Robert Burton finally reached Julesburg, he was bitterly disillusioned when Enid Culver informed him that she had tired of waiting for him, and had married Jack Smiley, gambler and boss of the hell-roaring town. In his rage, Burton beat Smiley unconscious.

He succeeded in throwing away all his money, and when he came out of his stupor the next morning he learned that his friend MacKaye had been captured by Smiley's men and taken out of town to be hung.

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Grabbing the nearest horse, Burton spurred to his friend's aid, but he arrived too late.

Then Smiley's mounted gang turned on Burton, and he fled across the prairie, hoping to draw Smiley out so he could meet him single-handed. Suddenly Smiley and his men turned and ran, and Burton saw the reason. Streaming over the prairie toward him came a band of hostile Indians.

CHAPTER IX.

PAWNEE SCOUTS.

STINGING perspiration was pouring into Captain Robert Burton's bloodshot eyes, making it impossible for him to get more than a glimpse of the Indians in pursuit. Over a dozen of them had leaped to their battle ponies, though the rest were content to gallop at a slower rate —ominously confident that the chase would not last long.

The black gelding skipped over the prairie like a jackrabbit pursued by coyotes, but the Indian ponies were fresh and rapidly narrowed the gap. Peering over his shoulder, Burton could already spy the gleam of red-tipped *coup* feathers flashing from lance, shield and bridle. Some of these Indians wore blue coats—probably souvenirs of one of the countless small forays that were forever going on.

Quickly the ex-cavalry captain's eye, expert in such matters, warned him that, barring some lucky accident, his headlong pursuers would soon come up with him.

"It's just as well," Burton reflected bitterly while the wind whistled by his ears. "Life's a mess—a ghastly mess. Oh, Colin! Colin!" Enid was lost, and Jessica Valcour was contemptuous of him.

"Let's see now," he panted, conscious that the black horse's hoofs beating a frantic tattoo on the hard baked earth were reminiscent of the fatal rolling of the drum before a military execution. "Fired two shots back among — cottonwoods — leaves four. Reckon—might take along one or two o' those devils for company."

His macabre planning came to an abrupt termination when the gelding put its right forefoot squarely into a prairie-dog hole and proceeded to go down with a sickening violence which hurled Burton head over heels across the dew-wetted prairie.

The sun briefly caught the red stripe of his trousers, then, by a miracle, he landed rolling, and so suffered no more than a jarring, paralyzing impact which drove most of the wind from his body and rendered him helpless for several furious instants during which he could have made his feeble fight for life.

Even to the last his bad luck was supreme. Why couldn't he have broken his neck and so suffered a swift and painless transition into the Vale Beyond? As it was, he painfully raised himself on one elbow and tried to cock the long-barreled Colt .44, to which he had instinctively clung. But he simply could not do more than that. He was too weak, and the whole sunlit plain rocked too crazily. Why, it was with difficulty that he even made out the onrushing forms of half a dozen screeching savages. The foremost instrument of death bestrode a piebald pony and wore a blue jacket of some kind, but the second savage brandished a spear and wore only a scarlet breech cloth and leggings.

Blue! By exerting a terrific effort, Burton cleared his swimming eyes in time to glimpse a wolf device painted on the second Indian's feather-decorated shield. In an instant he thought

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to recognize these swift riders as Pawnees—the Prussians of the Western plains—and deadly enemies of Sioux and Cheyenne alike.

Instantly he let his Colt thud to earth and feebly made the Pawnee peace sign—holding the first two fingers of his right hand raised vertically toward his ear lobe; he then shoved them forward to arm's length and finally tilted forward an imitation of the ears of a wolf who scents danger.

The effect upon those howling, copper-featured riders was instantaneous. Fully revealed in the golden red rays of the early sun, the foremost reined in on a regulation cavalry bridle, while his wilder looking companions jerked in cruel effectiveness upon rawhide hackamores.

"*Pa-ni I-ra-ri?* Pawnee brothers!" wheezed the prostrate white man, as long forgotten words flew back out of the fogs of memory.

ALL too well Burton realized that he was taking a fearful chance. Perhaps that red wolf on the shield was only a common ruse—such as was practiced hundreds of times a year; quite possibly these would prove to be some of Turkey Leg's Cheyennes.

With magnificent ease half a dozen smooth-limbed warriors vaulted off their battle ponies and came running forward, the foremost leveling a carbine pistol-wise and the others with spears raised.

The Indian in the blue jacket halted abruptly and cried in Pawnee, "Where have you been? Who are you?"

More snatches of the Pawnee tongue, learned during his Kansas boyhood, came back, and Burton, infinitely relieved, left his revolver on a tuft of buffalo grass to get up, bareheaded, ragged and grimy beyond description and wobbling on his legs like a toddling infant.

"Evil men—pursued me, O my brothers," he choked. "By bad medicine these men in the stable of the Iron Horse slew—a great warrior—my friend."

The leader of the immediate group nodded solemnly, and a *coup* feather grotesquely stuck into the brim of a cavalry Stetson mimicked the nod.

"Buffalo Caller knows there are evil men in the stable of the Iron Horse."

In a moment Burton's worst fears were allayed, and, helped by the fantastically garbed and evil smelling Pawnees, he limped over to view the unfortunate black horse. It had apparently broken its neck as well as foreleg, for it lay stiff-legged and still shivering in a purely muscular reaction.

"The pony is dead," grunted a flat-faced brave whose name appeared to be Bleeding Fox.

Both he and Buffalo Caller, Burton soon realized, were sub-chiefs, so he addressed them in the formal language due to leaders of the fighting Pawnees. Had he not been so utterly weary in body and in soul, Burton's natural sense of humor would have responded when more of the pursuers came cantering up, whooping and yelling, as Indians always did on such occasions.

Their costumes were an incredible and grotesque mingling of regular cavalry uniforms tempered by individual taste with savage finery. Many of these hawk-eyed Pawnees had carefully cut the seat out of regular issue cavalry breeches so as to permit their muscular thighs and buttocks to retain their customary grip on the bare backs or blankets of their steeds.

But, as it was, the long-limbed, dust-sprinkled ex-Confederate merely

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viewed with aching eyes a singular pair of figures which now rode up at the head of perhaps twenty-five more Skidi Pawnees.

One wore a complete cavalry officer's uniform save that he affected leggings and moccasins instead of boots. The other and foremost was a man of medium height with a short grizzled beard and two of the most piercing black eyes Burton had ever seen. He was completely clad in buckskins.

"WAL," he growled, "here's a pretty howdyedo—durned if the Major and me knows whether we oughter take you back to Hell on Wheels er not."

"Reckon Jack Smiley will thank you if you do," Burton replied heavily. "If you're a friend of his, he'll give you plenty of money."

"Me! A friend of that buzzard!" snorted the gray-bearded rider, and sent a parabola of tobacco juice to accurately recolor the eye socket of a bleached buffalo skull. "Wisht I could be sure you ain't yerself!"

"Well, Nick, I'll bet that whatever he is, he's not a friend of Smiley's—at least not at present." It was the second white man who spoke. This soldierly and solidly built individual was not at all old, though his face was so wrinkled and burnt by the plain's fierce sun that his complexion resembled old rawhide, but his yellow hair was bleached almost white. Keen gray eyes very busy, he sat a big half-bred hunter and eased the blue collar of a uniform bearing golden maple leaves stitched to yellow velvet shoulder straps. "That was Smiley himself in the lead back there. But, stranger, you had better give an account of yourself—and make it likely."

While wiping the accumulated dust and sweat from his face, Burton outlined the tragic events of the day and the one preceding; naturally, all reference to Enid Culver was omitted.

"So ye dotted Boot Hill Jack!" The grizzled rider in buckskins paused to spit again, this time at a horned toad, and sure enough sent the ugly creature hopping angrily away, its eyes full of tobacco juice.

"Wal, sir, I shore would enjoy shakin' the hand what punched that skunk. The name's Nick Janis—Dog Soldier Nick to my pardners." So saying, the frontiersman's hand closed in a vise-like grip. "This here gent with the eighteen karat ha'r is Major Frank North. You'll have heard o' North's Pawnee scouts, I reckon?"

When the three shook hands Burton read a cautious friendliness in the major's clear gray eyes, which were red-rimmed from the prairie's continual glare and with tiny white deposits of alkali in their corners.

"Where did you get the fancy breeches?" he demanded when Burton had drunk from a canteen and refreshed himself on hardtack and cold bacon.

"Down in Mexico," Burton mumbled, his mouth full, "'long with a lot of other stuff I've got rid of."

"What did you say you were aimin' to do in Julesburg?"

What had he aimed to do in Julesburg? A black tide of bitterness rose ever higher in his heart.

"Why," haltingly replied the lean ex-Confederate, and his gaze sought a dim blur marking the Platte, "I had reckoned on a deal there—a deal that meant a lot. But—well, suh, it fell through, and my last cent's gone. As I told you, Smiley and his ruffians lynched my partner for defendin' himself:"

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Eyes narrowed, Major North passed a thoughtful hand over a square chin that jutted strongly out from beneath the brim of his black cavalry hat.

"Too bad, Captain—sounds like it was a regular Julesburg reception they gave you—but you've got to expect it if you go playin' around Hell on Wheels. It's a sink of vice and a trouble breeder— Wish Jack Casement—" His voice trailed off.

"Oh, I've been several kinds of a fool," Burton admitted in a dreary, toneless voice; then he straightened sagging shoulders, forced a smile to his dust-rimmed lips and said, "'Fraid I've taken up a lot of your time, Major North, so now I'll be on my way. Thanks again for your help, suh—sorry I can't repay you. Good-by." He nodded and, spurred boots dragging wearily, started away from the ring of silent Pawnee scouts.

"HEY, Cap'n!" Dog Soldier Nick's thin but powerful voice came ringing after him. "If ye're right keen to part with your ha'r, jest you keep on the way ye're headed. Thar's a Cheyenne village o' forty lodges not ten mile to north."

A horseman came trotting up, and the square brown face of Major North looked down at the soldier of fortune.

"Just where do you think you're going?" North demanded while the copper-featured Pawnees looked on in wooden silence. "Not that it's any of my business."

"Why—why, it doesn't matter much," was Burton's stony reply. "And I'm afraid, suh, I'm delayin' you-all."

"Don't be a fool," said Major North, not unkindly. "Life may be worth living again to-morrow." With this the leader turned in his saddle and in guttural Pawnee called out a string of commands which resulted in the placing of the dead horse's equipment upon a strong bay pony. "Mount up, Captain, and come along with us—you won't last long otherwise." The golden maple leaves flashed in the new risen sun as North pointed to the rear. "Look back there."

On the top of a distant butte stood several black specks.

"Smiley?" Burton demanded when the yellow-haired major lowered a battered pair of field glasses.

"Yes. That's who it is. Persistent cuss, your friend Smiley."

"Friend!" Burton turned a face so terrible that Major North stiffened, and one of the younger scouts half raised a carbine. "Friend?" Then a sudden change sent a steely glitter to the ex-Confederate's eyes. "By God, Smiley is a friend! That hound has given me something to live for. If it's the last thing I do—I'll kill him!"

"Easy said, but a heap harder to do," Nick Janis warned. "Others have tried it, but they didn't get nawthin' but some lead in the back and dirt in their faces. Boot Hill Jack's jest about king of these yere mesas, so don't go skyhootin' back into Julesburg less'n you've got plenty o' hard-shootin' hombres to back you up."

"I'm going back," Burton pronounced slowly and distinctly. "Smiley is strong, but I'll settle with him."

The Pawnees, few of whom could understand English, nevertheless read the rescued man's expression and approved.

Bleeding Fox said to Buffalo Caller, "The captain with the long knife is a true warrior. See? He understands vengeance as we of the Wolf Clan know it."

All the while narrowly watched by

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perhaps thirty expressionless Pawnees, Robert Burton retrieved his revolver and cleaned it of dust and grit before making sure that his long knife was still tight in its sheath. Then, with a face which might have been hewn out of brown marble, he swung up on the bay pony and sat it firmly, even gracefully, when it did its best to throw him in a series of vicious bucks and sunfishes.

A murmur of approval passed along the weirdly caparisoned detachment when the rebellion ended with Burton still in the saddle.

"Wagh! Long Knife is a horseman!" Buffalo Caller remarked to all and sundry.

With an amazing lack of bustle the scouting party got under way, leaving the dead horse to the tender attentions of a flock of crows and magpies which, having appeared from nowhere, now flew overhead and shrieked in noisy anticipation of the feast to come.

AT the end of three hours' ride the picturesque detachment, its rear elements lost in a cloud of dust, was trotting along a trail which roughly paralleled the newly completed course of the Union Pacific; but, even so, the sable-haired and befeathered scouts maintained their cautious demeanor.

"So you were in that wreck at Willow Creek," North was commenting. "My God, it *is* a small world. I was up at end-o'-track and getting set for a good meal of buffalo kidneys when in runs a wild-eyed telegrapher.

"'Major North,' says he, 'them blasted red devils have gone and done it at last.'

"'Done what?' I asked. 'Poured some brains into that thick skull of yours?'

"'No, sir. Word's just come in from Kearney that a bunch of Cheyennes have derailed Number Fifteen, and they've massacred most o' the passengers. The fireman,' he goes on to say, 'got scalped, but ran all the way to Clear Creek and gave the word.' You see, Captain, we raise 'em tough out here," North added in grim humor.

"Well, sir," continued North, lighting a battered old pipe and passing his pouch over to the ex-Confederate, who silently refused it, "I ordered hosses and these Pawnees o' mine aboard some cars and broke records on the way to Willow Island, but all we found was some drunken stragglers, the smoldering wreck and some odd pieces o' the train crew scattered about on the prairie. Of course the Dog Soldiers and the rest o' the Cheyennes had vamoosed." The yellow-haired Chief of Scouts with his pipe stem indicated the grizzled man in fringed buckskins. "By the way, Nick Janis' Injun name is Dog Soldier Killer, but we all call him Dog Soldier Nick."

"Why?" Burton glanced up, more out of politeness than anything else. He was weary, numbed in body and spirit, utterly jaded and discouraged.

"Because 'bout twenty years ago the old fellow licked three Dog Soldiers single-handed." He sent a puff of smoke drifting back over the war feathers of his savage followers. "But to go back to Willow Creek, we also found about sixty big blood spots —no Cheyenne bodies, of course—so you must have put up a good fight."

Dog Soldier Nick, his bristle-covered jaws busy on a new chew, drew his sleek bay pony up alongside. "Yes, and don't forget them chunks o' meat what was poor Bully Brooks and Gregg Henshaw." The frontiers-

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man spat down a prairie-dog hole. "They was some other whites on a little hilltop. All cut to kybobs, they were."

Burton roused himself enough to say, "Yes, but they were dead before the Indians got 'em—"

"They were lucky. Well, we've been lookin' for Turkey Leg's band ever since," North pursued, his reddened eyes ever sweeping the buffalo-dotted plains. "They've scattered, like they generally do after a raid— Makes it pretty hard to run down the guilty ones."

A short silence reigned among the three whites, and the *clip-clop* of their horses' hoofs sounded monotonously over the guttural conversation farther back.

AGAINST the side of his carbine's worn scabbard Major North tapped out the pipe's ashes. "What do you aim to do when we get to end-o'-track?"

"Is that where you're headed?" Burton's eyes sought those of North.

"Yes; we ought to reach there toward sundown if we don't cut the trail of a war party. Any ideas on a job?"

"Why—why, I don't know; hadn't given the matter much thought," slowly replied the soldier of fortune. As if it mattered! "Reckon I'll head where there's fightin'. You see, suh, I've been skirmishin' about off and on durin' most of the last six years, so war's the only trade I know."

"Soldier of fortune, eh?" North was wiping his heavy features with a blue bandanna that was knotted about his neck.

"Perhaps I could land a job with some meat hunter's outfit. Fellow on the train said they make as high as five hundred dollars a month."

Major North snorted in genial derision. "Thought you said you were a fighter?"

"Who says I'm not?" Blood crept out along Burton's cheek bones and dyed the long scar along the roots of his raven hair.

"Not I," replied the other quickly. "You'd get plenty of excitement with the buffalo hunters, but they're really just glorified butchers." North winked. "Don't repeat that to Dog Soldier Nick. He used to be one—still goes out, off and on, when things are slack. Should see him at work—it's a liberal education.

"What's wrong with joinin' the Pawnee scouts? I'm needin' another subordinate since" — the chief of scouts' fine features contracted— "since Tom Cummings got murdered in Hell on Wheels last week."

"What rank?" Faint interest shone in Burton's sunken eyes.

"I expect I maybe could get you a commission as captain of scouts," Major North replied. "Do you know Injuns?"

"Some," the ex-Confederate admitted. "I hail from east Kansas, where I was raised. Besides Pawnee, I can palaver along in Kiowa, Arapaho and Sioux. Know the sign language, too, of course."

"You must have a good ear for language."

"Tol'rable, Major, nothin' more."

Major North considered in silence a while, then said, "We'll have a talk with General Casement when we reach the end-o'-track. Since it's danger and excitement you want, Captain, I guess we can accommodate you pretty easy, and if you're handy enough with your weapons you may be of some use to both the U. P. and North's Pawnee scouts."

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"I reckon I've still a lot to learn," Burton admitted doubtfully, his hand wandering to the side of his belt. "But here's a sample—of what I do know." A fraction of a second later a Pawnee riding a few horses' length in front let out a startled screech; the ten-inch knife had flashed by his ear and, narrowly missing two other scouts, very neatly pinned to the earth an incautious prairie dog which had lingered too long in inspecting the colorful cavalcade.

"Wagh!" A shout of excited approval arose from the Pawnees when the little animal gave a final kick.

"Great leapin' Moses!" Dog Soldier Nick began to swear delightedly, his snaggle yellow teeth exposed in an ecstatic grin. "And ye'll 'low ye've still things to l'arn?"

"Yes," replied Burton, exhibiting not the least trace of elation. "Down in Mexico a man isn't rated a real knife thrower till he can nail a crow on the wing."

"A good touch—that knife play," North commented dryly. "The Pawnees will respect you a bit now."

A grinning Pawnee brave in a seatless pair of yellow-striped pantaloons bent suddenly from his pony and retrieved Burton's curious knife, then excitedly held it up. One by one the various bucks examined its bloodied blade, its handle of polished rawhide, and most intently of all, its bright brass tang which was fashioned in the shape of a wolf's head. This, it seemed, bore a special and pleasing significance for these splendidly proportioned if foul-smelling warriors.

"Knife throwing is all very well," Major North commented, "but around here you generally don't have time to get gay with a knife. What can you do with that thing?" He pointed to Burton's long-barreled .44.

Burton hesitated and shook his dusty black head. "I'm not so good with a gun, suh," he confessed. "And since I'm kind of shaken now, I reckon I'll wait till we fetch up where we're goin' to prove myself."

"That'll do all right, Captain—Too bad you're an ex-Rebel."

"I've seen a lot around the U. P.—and, besides, I took the oath after Appomattox."

"That's the trouble—Colonel Barry doesn't like 'em much. Well, we'll see—"

CHAPTER X.

A COLD RECEPTION.

IT was toward sunset that Captain Robert Burton, who was riding with Dog Soldier Nick in advance of the main detachment, first noted several pale blue columns of smoke rising from beyond a high butte.

"Well, there's the end-o'-track," called Major North, who had ridden far out on the right flank. "It's a damned shame we couldn't have come across a few dozen of Turkey Leg's murdering devils."

"Since they've now got a taste for train wreckin', we'll lock horns with some of them vermin yet," Dog Soldier Nick predicted as he eased his carbine back into a beautifully fringed and beaded rawhide boot. This, he proudly explained, had been decorated by his third squaw—a nice Kiowa wench who always bore him boy babies.

Ever childlike, the Pawnees, on receiving North's consent, raised their peculiar wailing war cry, struck heels to their ponies, and in a disorderly column raced forward to plunge over the lip of a steep bluff, and so momentarily

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disappeared, only to be seen again, their bright red, yellow and blue blankets flung high in the air and their *coup* feathers threshing madly.

Major North shrugged and, smiling quietly, turned to the silent, bareheaded figure beside him. "You can't stop 'em from that. They're honest enough to admit they love a show. Tickles the Paddies and Micks, too."

"Live and learn, Cap'n. See them wise old bucks?" Dog Soldier Nick jerked his head sidewise toward Buffalo Caller and Bleeding Fox, who, alone of the scouts, had not gone careering off to camp. "Ye don't find them *sabio* redskins committin' no sech fool stunts. *They* know durned well some day thar's goin' to be a green camp guard on duty that'll cut loose fer gen'ral results into them playful Pawnees."

"—And green troops are all we've been gettin' recently," Major North added with a heavy sigh.

"Yes"—Burton made almost his first effort to join in the conversation —"I reckon most of the Civil War boys have headed for home?"

"There are a few veterans left; that's what has saved the situation up to now," gloomily replied the organizer of the Pawnee scouts. "When they're gone—God knows what will happen."

A moment more the five riders paused at the crest of the butte to view the amazing, eye-filling panorama revealed, map-like, at their feet. Robert Burton started and blinked, aware once more of that same dynamic atmosphere which had prevailed in Julesburg. From the plain below arose a singular blend of sounds and noises all in the harsh key of action; the clang of iron on steel, the thud of hammers, the puffing of locomotives, the creaking of axles—all contributed to this vital uproar.

For an instant the ex-Confederate found it hard to believe that the war between the states was really at an end; surely he must once again be viewing the tented encampment of a Union Army. Furthering the impression, the white cones of hundreds of Sibley tents were arranged in regular company streets, and nearer to the track were dugouts exactly similar to hundreds he had seen in the vicinity of Vicksburg.

A LOUD cracking of whips and groaning of axles shifted the amazed onlooker's attention to an old freighting and stage coach road skirting the bluffs on which they stood. Along it was toiling at snail's pace an emigrant train consisting of some twenty enormous Conestoga wagons and prairie schooners. These vehicles were equipped with ponderous six- and eight-foot wheels, and each was drawn by no less than six yoke of heavy-footed oxen. Amid a sifting, all-pervading cloud of dust they crept along, swaying tops dully agleam in the sunset.

Alongside, mounted men herded spare oxen, horses and milk cows and their calves.

"Quite a sight, ain't it? 'Nother Mormon train headed fer old Brigham Young's Paradise on Earth," Dog Soldier Nick stated, and slung a well-bowed leg around his saddle's horn.

"Reckon so—'tisn't a bit like I'd thought," Burton admitted.

"Yonder's the right-of-way—probably all built to-day." North evidently sensed the ex-Confederate's awe and amazement, for he added, "I'm not exaggerating."

Out of the camp and paralleling a

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stream called Lodge Pole Creek a long embankment of disturbed dark earth lanced into the prairie for a distance of easily three miles ahead of the last pair of gleaming rails. A line of telegraph poles, however, was already erected and the wires were strung out to the farthest limit of activity—a precaution against Indians, North explained.

It being the evening hour, dozens of grading crews and construction gangs were now returning to camp, the former riding four-horse supply carts, the latter on hand cars, and all of them whooping and singing as if the prospect of food was too much for their empty stomachs.

Farther out and on the fringes of this great encampment the ex-Confederate's eye detected the tents and pickets of strategically disposed detachments of infantry and cavalry. Yes, yonder was a familiar sight—a picket line with its horses kicking and biting at each other, as picketed troop horses always have and always will.

He was recalled to the present by North's deep voice saying, "It's a great sight, but we'll have to hurry if we're to report to the general and still draw food and forage for ourselves and our mounts tonight."

"Look at them durn ijits!" Dog Soldier Nick grinned and slapped his lean thigh.

Whooping and yelling, the Pawnee scouts were now galloping in a circle on the near side of camp. Some stood up on their ponies to fire their carbines and revolvers in the air, and others performed the most amazing feats of horsemanship Burton had seen in a long time. Now one of the scouts would slide sidewise beneath his pony's belly to promptly reappear on the other side of his mount; another would leap off only to remount his animal at a full gallop.

Watching this free show stood a cheering and fascinated crowd of laborers.

"Casement's Irish love 'em," Dog Soldier Nick grunted. "They're jest as wild as the Injuns. Them Pawnees and Micks get along like pups in a basket."

"You see, Captain," North explained as he put his horse to the forty-degree slope and slid down it almost carelessly, "there's a practical reason too. The Irish damned well know if it weren't for my scouts a lot of 'em would lose their hair. In spite of all we could do, the Cheyennes and Sioux killed or captured over thirty laborers last month. As I've already said, you've come at the right time—the showdown is due this summer."

"Showdown? I don't understand, suh."

"It's this way. The fighting tribes—Sioux, Blackfeet, Cheyennes and Arapahoes—to name a few—know that if the U. P. is built, their hunting grounds are sure to be ruined, and"—his voice became deep with earnestness—"they're goin' to move heaven and hell to stop the railroad, or force the U. P. to build farther south. And the road will have to go south if President Johnson doesn't send more troops. The redskins are knocking off surveying parties and supply trains almost every day. But you can't blame the Injuns much, at that," thoughtfully added the chief of scouts. "When the buffalo and antelope go they'll starve and go bare. They know it and they're desperate."

"And if this route is abandoned to build south—what then?"

"Ruin. It'll mean the road can't go on. The Kansas Pacific's there already.

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Besides, the government wouldn't subsidize the Union Pacific any more. As it is, Congress is yelling like pigs under a gate."

THEY presently rode down along a gentle slope and crossed behind the immigrant train which was plodding on down that track commonly known as the Thirty Mile Ridge Road. After crossing a stretch of prairie, entirely denuded of sagebrush by immigrants and railroad men in search of the pitifully scant fuel, the five presently reined in at a picket post where a quartet of sunburned cavalrymen in dust-stained blue stood to horse beside a pair of pup tents, and a sergeant smartly presented saber to Major North.

"Find any of them, sir?" inquired the sergeant, whose broad yellow chevrons and yellow leg stripes shone golden in the sunlight.

"Not this time, Sergeant," North called as they rode by. "But we'll get 'em soon."

After five minutes of trotting through tented streets as precisely laid out as those of any regiment, Burton and his guide drew rein with his companions in front of a large tent before which was posted a crudely painted sign—"Construction Division H. Q."

"Come along; Nick will take the animals over to our camp," North directed after Burton had dismounted, and, ever the good cavalryman, had eased the cinch of his scrawny little Indian pony. The beast, as though astonished at such unprecedented consideration, none the less snapped at him. Life was like that, reflected the ex-Confederate.

The last golden sunbeams of this unforgettable day were striking almost horizontally through the big tent's door and so revealed a couple of orderlies who sprang up and saluted when Major North appeared. Farther in, a captain and a gray-haired colonel in the uniforms of the Regular Army stood in deep conversation. They looked about expectantly when the yellow-haired chief of Pawnee scouts appeared, his moccasined feet making very little noise.

"We were just talking about you, Major," the captain said. "Glad to have you back—there's been the devil to pay."

"That you, North?" From behind a table at the far end of the headquarters tent a large red-headed man in dusty civilian clothes sprang up and hurried forward, hands outstretched in welcome. Burton, in the background, felt an instinctive liking for this big, barrel-chested man with the flaming red beard and humorously capable mouth. On him, too, was stamped the brand of men who strive, and who are not easily turned aside.

"Yes, General. Sorry to have been gone so long."

"Well, North, did yez catch Turkey Leg?"

"No, sir." North began to pull off his fringed gauntlets. "He and his band got away too fast, except a few stragglers."

"Then yez did get some?" There was just a lilting injection of a brogue in General Jack Casement's speech.

"Only about half a dozen scalps, that's all." And then the Indian fighter swiftly described his movements since leaving the wreck at Willow Creek. Meanwhile Captain Robert Burton stood silent and, on becoming aware of the searching regard of the man in the colonel's uniform, he pulled his aching body to attention and remained

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as rigidly erect as if he were once more standing before big, golden-bearded Jeb Stuart.

"And who might this be?" General Casement leveled penetrating blue eyes and a stubby brown forefinger at the straight figure in the Mexican belt and the red-striped breeches.

"Don't know much about Captain Burton," North replied, "except that he's very handy with his weapons. He tells me he was in the Rebel cavalry — Forrest's command — during the late war, and since then has been fightin' for the Mexican Emperor. Smiley's crowd were chasing him hell for leather out of Julesburg when we cut his trail."

THE Contractor General of the Union Pacific joined heavy red brows and addressed Captain Robert Burton.

"Stand easy," he directed. "Yez will have been having a hard day. Is that true what Frank North tells me?"

"Yes, suh—on my word," replied Burton.

"Then yez don't seem to have overmuch skill in picking a winning side," came Casement's dry observation.

How pitifully true! Neither in love nor war had Robert Burton been right. What a fool he'd been to let heart rule head. Well, no more of that from now on.

"No, suh. All I ask is a job and a chance at Smiley and his crowd.'

The big Irishman settled abruptly back in his chair behind the paper-littered table. "Oh, yez do, do yez? And what were yez thinkin' of doin'? Major North tells me you're stony broke."

"I—well, suh, I haven't any special ideas—"

"I'd thought of taking him into the Pawnee scouts," North suggested quietly. "I need a new captain since poor Cummings got murdered."

"If Franks wants yez, why, I—" Casement began.

"Sorry, sir." Cold as the rasp of a skate on ice came the voice of the colonel who had been so closely studying the ex-Confederate. "I regret that, in my opinion, this fellow is not acceptable for a commission in the United States Army."

"And just why, Colonel Barry, is Captain Burton so decidedly unacceptable?" Casement's chair creaked as he turned to face the harshly handsome officer in blue.

Every head in the tent turned to face the thin, nervous-looking officer in command of the troops assigned for the protection of the railroad builders.

"Because," came Colonel Barry's precise, inflectionless tones, "we already have too many damned ex-Rebels in our ranks — I simply won't have any more." He turned stiffly to confront the uncomfortable Contractor General. "Please recall, sir, that I have spoken on this subject before—and you agreed, so—"

"I object to that, Colonel," Major North cut in, in his calm yet effective voice. "The Amnesty Decree makes objections on such grounds invalid."

"Legally, no doubt," immediately replied the colonel, his overbred features flushing just a little. "But it happens that I have heard of this man. Robert Burton was one of Bedford Forrest's most trusted lieutenants. No doubt a very fit subordinate for that cowardly swine of a guerrilla!"

"By God!" His Indian-like face flaming, Burton surged forward and was barely restrained by North. "How

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dare you call General Forrest a guerrilla?"

"Maybe I *am* wrong," the colonel said with a wolfish smile. "I should more advisedly have called him a butcher. Perhaps you were on hand to murder the Negroes who surrendered at Fort Pillow?"

In an instant Burton would have torn himself free and flung himself upon the sneering, gray-haired officer had not Major North again clutched him by the shoulder of his buckskin shirt.

"Steady!" he snapped in a commanding undertone. "Steady! It'll do you no good to fly off the handle."

"But it's a damned lie!" Burton cried in a quivering voice. "General Forrest was and is a brave, gallant soldier."

"You see?" Frigidly pleased, Colonel Barry turned to Casement, who sat with thoughtful blue eyes fixed on the panting ex-Confederate. "That's why I don't want any more Rebels in my forces. They're hot-headed, insubordinate, and quarrelsome!"

"Faith," Casement muttered, his fingers drumming on the table in front of him, "I know plenty of Yanks who would have got red-headed, too, had yez said such things about Sheridan or Custer. But"—his shoulders rose, disturbing the pattern of the checked shirt he wore—"'tis you who have charge of the defense, so—"

"But really, General," Major North broke out, for the first time a little heated, "I want Captain Burton—I'll vouch for his conduct."

"Sorry, Major, I won't recommend a commission for him, and that's flat." Barry treated North to a fish-like stare, then, his thin shoulders more rigid than ever, he plucked up a paper from the table. "Now, then, General, about that forage for the advance guard—it's been scant and of abominable quality."

SEETHING with impotent rage, Burton followed his rescuer out of the tent, but he had mastered himself by the time they had gained the center of the tented street.

Summoning a wan smile he held out his hand.

"Thank you for your trouble, suh. I'll never forget your kindness when I needed it most." Disregarding North's protest, he went on. "Pray don't involve yourself any further on my account. I'll make out, somehow—"

"And some fine day," snapped the chief of the Pawnee scouts, his jaw squarer than ever, "court-martial or no court-martial, I'm going to punch that sneering Barry in the snoot. There's a typical West Point tin soldier for you! The poor fool thinks he's still fighting the Rebels— Why, he came within an ace of having two troops of the Seventh cut off and massacred by Sioux last spring!"

He passed a friendly arm through Burton's. "Come along," he urged, and waved a hand toward the outer edge of the camp, where perhaps thirty buffalo-hide tepees pointed their lodge poles and smoke-blackened vents toward the red and gold splendor of the twilight sky. "There'll be some supper for us over yonder. We can talk further about this on a full belly. Did you ever notice, Captain, few things seem very serious after a good meal?"

"You are mighty kind, suh," Burton protested, "but I owe you too much already. It would only complicate—" Instinctively he whirled about, hand on knife; some one had touched him on the shoulder. It proved to be a hatchet-faced clerk in a bat-

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tered felt hat and a brass-buttoned waistcoat.

"Cap'n Burton?" the messenger drawled. "General Casement says for you to come back and see him after supper."

CHAPTER XI.

BUFFALO HUNT.

WHEN he awoke, Captain Robert Burton was still the tight-lipped, somber individual of the night before, but a few humorous lines had returned to the corners of his wide mouth and he was no longer so completely dazed. Supine, he lay on his heap of soft, buffalo-calf robes running back over that conversation in the headquarters tent.

"For the time being," General Casement had said while tugging at at that full red beard of his, "we can use yez as a meat hunter. It'll fill in the time while I—er—machinate a bit. Those plagued redskins are harrying the very divil out of our forage parties. No fresh meat for ten days. The pay will be four hundred a month, and," the sunburnt track Contractor General had added with a purely Celtic twinkle, "not one cent of it'll be paid lest yez stay sober as a priest and bring in eight buffalo a day. 'Tis a hungry gang we have here, Captain, and maybe yez will have noticed at yer wars that nothing starts trouble and disaffection quicker than slim rations. Now get along with yez, and talk to Dog Soldier Nick—he'll equip yez at company expense—deductable from yer first pay."

"Dog Soldier Nick?" Burton looked up quickly. "I thought he was of the Pawnee scouts?"

"So he is—but he's first of all a buffalo hunter at heart. He gets sorrowful if he lacks a hunt once a week."

Anon Burton arose, sought a certain greasy haversack and fell avidly to gnawing a ration of army hardtack, beans and "sow-belly." Just what had the big Irishman meant by "for the time being"? And also his later phrase, "I'll be having a special use fer yez later if you've a stomach for such work"?

Dawn was but a promise in the starry, fathomless night sky when Dog Soldier Nick appeared from a near-by lodge in which his three Indian wives and his joyous litter of half-breed children lived, breathed and had their being. The step of his moccasined feet was so silent Burton was almost taken by surprise.

"Wal, at least ye ain't no sleepy head," commented the frontiersman, "but ye've got a lot to learn if ye're to become a good buffalo hunter. First off ye'd better get rid o' them high-falutin bunion builders." Contemptuously he indicated the thorn-scarred black boots Burton had not as yet pulled on. "And as for them striped tin soljer pants, leave sich giddy nonsense to the Yaller Legs and the Dough Boys. A half blind Injun boy could spot 'em a mile off. Hyar's a pair of buckskin britches good enough fer a Ogallala chief; and these yere moccasins'll let yer board a pony a sight sprier than them there jack boots."

Among certain valuable habits Burton had formed during his years of campaigning was a willingness to listen and carefully consider all suggestions from those in whose country he lived. Flexibility—always flexibility, whether in custom, ethics or in manner of warfare.

Accordingly, the ex-Confederate

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murmured a word of earnest appreciation and removed the expensive blue and red breeches fashioned for him by that voluble little tailor in the far-off Tampico. That Nick was entirely right Burton appreciated when he pulled on the much more pliant and nearly waterproof buckskin breeches, the thighs of which were liberally if brilliantly decorated with blue and white bead work.

"THEY'RE right comfortable," he said with a faint return of his old lightness. "When I have something to give them, I'll make your wives a present."

"Don't spoil 'em," grunted Dog Soldier Nick. "Them squaws feel plenty rewarded if ye don't beat 'em more'n twice a week. Come on, Long Knife—by the bye, that's what the Pawnees hev christened ye—we've got to mosey along, and we're late as it is. There ain't been no meat in camp fer the last ten days. Ye see"—the frontiersman spat resoundingly—"Waters and his outfit shure got clipped o' their nappers by a passel o' Red Shields last Monday, and less'n 'Pache Jack Ware and his boys show up this mornin' with some carcasses, there'll be plenty o' empty bellies, sore heads and hell to pay in camp to-night."

"Hell to pay? Why? Haven't they ever gone hungry before?"

The grizzled frontiersman looked grave as he slung a sagging pouch of cartridges over his shoulder.

"Well, ye see, Cap'n—that ain't all what's wrong."

"No?"

"No. Fer some reason nobody rightly understands why, the Micks and pick swingers have been gettin' ugly. No fresh meat to-night would be like setting the buffalo grass afire; easy to start, but hell to stop. These Irishmen are wild, I'm tellin' ye. That's why the Gen'ral asked Pa-ni Leshar, Major North, to rig out a special buffalo huntin' outfit and"—Dog Soldier Nick smirked modestly—"picked me to run it."

At the picket line to which the Pawnee scouts hitched their nervous little ponies they found Buffalo Caller and a quartet of owl-eyed Pawnees waiting with blankets and hackamores already adjusted. Six Regular Army spring carts, each drawn by four horses and occupied by a civilian teamster and at least one skinner, loomed in the background. Horses stamped and snuffled while Dog Soldier Nick silently dealt out to each Indian a heavy caliber, repeating Spencer carbine which could throw eight-ounce bullets with sufficient force to knock down not only the biggest bison that roamed the plains; also any man careless enough to fire it when off balance.

Single mounts having been saddled and the gear gone over a final time, the buffalo hunters set off through the sleeping encampment with a minimum of noise.

Gradually the morning song of the coyotes dwindled, whereupon larks, quail and a host of song birds commenced to whistle as if in a melodious endeavor to bring sanity back to a distracted world.

"Reckon our best bet's to head up Ash Hollow way," decided Dog Soldier Nick after a long cogitation. "That's whar they won't be lookin' fer a meat party. Ever hunted bufflers before?" he demanded of the moody ex-Confederate.

"Yes." Burton roused himself with an effort. "Years ago. Do you-all ring 'em hereabouts or gallop 'em?"

"Bufflers is a sight too scary to be ringed these days," replied the fron-

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tiersman, "so we'll have to gallop the critters—takin' care not to run 'em too fast and string the car-kisses too fur out. That's bad medicine in times like these."

ALREADY the hunters had begun to sight scattered groups of bison. In twos and threes the shaggy-bearded brutes were browsing on the dew-heavy grass, but, lacking the mass courage of a herd, they dashed away at a ponderous gallop, snorting loudly and jerking their ridiculously tiny tails.

"Hope we don't scare any more o' them plagued strays," Dog Soldier Nick muttered and uneasily craned his leathery neck in all directions. "Scairt strays is the surest warning to Injuns of a meat party. We'll have to make this trip mighty quick out and back."

Dawn was now making a dazzling glory of the eastern sky, and the draft horses drawing the spring wagons had become well lathered when at last the frontiersman's command brought the expedition to a halt. Robert Burton drew a deep breath on gazing up a wide little valley which seemed to be carpeted by a vast brown carpet, segments of which varied in shade from tawny yellow to dark chocolate. Unbroken, but shifting, the pattern extended as far as the eye could reach.

"Gawd," cried a young teamster, "all them ain't buffaloes?"

"Sure," replied a long-whiskered driver. "What did you think they was? Sea lions?"

"You're goin' to start at the upper end o' the valley, aren't you?" Burton quietly inquired while slipping a handful of carbine cartridges into the front of his buckskin shirt.

"Yep." Dog Soldier Nick looked surprised. "But why did yer ask?"

"Well, if we run the buffaloes toward camp, the teamsters can be skinnin' and cuttin' them up while headin' for home at the same time."

"You *have* hunted bufflers before." Exposing his gap teeth in a grin, the frontiersman turned aside and called a string of commands in Pawnee to the five silent Indians who sat with bright jet eyes ever studying the skyline. The scouts, Burton noted, appeared to be as uneasy as Indians would ever permit themselves to look.

"Shake a leg about this, you gunners," grunted a veteran driver of the nearest team. "I ain't aimin' to have my backside filled with arrers like pore Curly Waters."

Taking cover, Buffalo Caller, Burton and Nick, followed by the Pawnees, skirted the line of high bluffs forming the valley's western wall and then suddenly turned and, in a long single file, rode out on the floor of the depression. In uneasy silence the teamsters and skinners remained where they were, watching the horsemen. Ears attuned for Nick's piercing yell to start the slaughter, the hunters, as one, turned and trotted toward the buffaloes in line abreast.

Stationed on the extreme right of line, Robert Burton felt his breath quicken pleasurably; there must have been ten thousand buffaloes grazing in the long but comparatively narrow valley. On the outskirts of the great herd many towering bulls kept guard, and every now and then interrupted their grazing to lower their massive heads and futilely charge certain wraith-like gray wolves which, disdainful of daylight, still circled warily around the flanks in hopes of pulling down a sick beast or a straying calf.

On setting his mustang to a quick trot, Burton cast one last glance over

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his shoulder and saw the drivers and skinners lighting their pipes, but with the carbines stacked significantly ready to hand. Off to the left Pawnee feathers were flashing in the new sun as they lifted their battle ponies to a slow gallop.

"Go get 'em! Wagh! *Ki-yi! Yip! Yip! Yip!*"

Dog Soldier Nick's long-drawn whoop echoed loudly among the buttes, but only a few of the brutes raised their heads and gazed stupidly about; promptly they resumed their cropping of the succulent buffalo grass.

Despite the seven-mile trip out from camp, Burton's mustang proved as full of life as if it had freshly quitted the picket line and, like a thrown lance, it skimmed ahead.

HE'D six shots, Burton told himself, and each bullet *should* mean meat for the brawny crews at the end-o'-track. Had he forgotten the old art of cutting out the tender young cows at a gallop? Could he still send a bullet thudding accurately home behind the left foreleg? Cognizant of the value of each second, the ex-Confederate promptly singled out a young cow on the edge of the herd standing very contentedly beside an enormous bull. She would be his first consideration; that bull, though much bigger, would, save for his hump, be tough as an old boot sole.

The mustang increased his headlong run until a cool morning wind brushing against Burton's face felt almost cold. Now beasts on the nearer edge of the great herd were at last beginning to show signs of alarm; head after head was jerking up. At last a sentry bull snorted, flicked up his tail and began to walk off along the edge of the herd. At a walk the selected cow moved unhurriedly away, all the while licking her moist brown snout and mildly eying the horse and rider.

Bang! Far off on the left of line a Pawnee rifle split the stillness into a thousand resounding echoes. The herd as a whole awoke to its danger and thousands of buffaloes got to their feet.

"Time to get busy! Get along, horse!"

The mustang, evidently trained to this work, needed no guidance, so Burton dropped his knotted reins and, guiding the beast with his thighs, whipped up the heavy Spencer, sighted just back of the walking cow's shoulder and fired. The heavy recoil made his teeth rattle, and the mustang shied a little, but the cow stood still, shivering violently for an instant, before quietly collapsing with a bullet through her heart. Precipitately, the hitherto only mildly cautious wolves rushed for cover.

At the carbine's report the nearer edge of the vast herd now took active alarm and broke at once into that rocking gallop so peculiar to the bison, which never trots. It was, as Burton had long ago learned, a most deceptive gait; it looked so slow and yet covered so much ground. Without urging, the well-trained pony quickened his gallop and, hanging onto the edge of the herd, brought his now thoroughly exhilarated rider within thirty yards of a likely looking cow. He fired again, and was not surprised that his target promptly stumbled and turned in a heavy somersault.

A dull thunder born of thousands of hoofs stamping the earth became noticeable, then swelled into a roar while clouds of blinding dust arose and the great carpet commenced to undulate,

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to flow out of the little valley in the direction of Lodge Pole Creek.

Once the herd got into full motion, shooting became infinitely harder, and Burton's third shot merely mortally wounded a shaggy monster which kept on for a good hundred yards before slowing. His blood warming, Burton shot again and again, punctuating each discharge with a ringing shout. He had forgotten how madly exciting such a hunt could be, how incredibly blood-stirring was this wild surging along. Nor was the sport without grave dangers; let the mustang but put his foot in a hole—as had the black gelding—and the hundreds of hurrying hoofs would in a few seconds flatten him into a bloody pulp. He kept a sharp lookout for such buffaloes as were running outside of him and the herd, for such scattered parties often came rushing in with vicious little charges.

IT was an enormous bull from such a group that nearly terminated the hunt for Burton then and there, when, with the speed of an express train, it came charging in from the right, head lowered and wicked, upturned horns aimed like lance heads to disembowel the mustang. Barely in time the ex-Confederate dodged the bull's ponderous rush, and when the clever mustang swung alongside he fired into the brute's shoulder and dropped it, kicking furiously, into the sagebrush with its wool a-smolder from the discharge.

Now began the very difficult task of reloading the Spencer while riding at a full gallop and completely surrounded by buffaloes. Some of the lumbering beasts were actually brushing his legs and with his carbine barrel he could have touched half a dozen. To rein in would mean losing all chance to kill more buffaloes within easy range of the skinners. So, perforce, he struggled and prayed that the mustang would keep its footing, and bitterly cursed those men who had designed the Spencer to load through its butt plate.

It was an exceedingly awkward business to wrench out the plunger and then feed bullets snatched from his shirt front into a comparatively tiny aperture. Nevertheless his horsemanship was such that ere long his weapon was loaded again and he was racing along, firing point blank into the woolly sides of a panic-stricken bison.

By the time his magazine was empty a second time he had, he calculated, accounted for an even ten buffaloes of varying sizes and sexes; if the other hunters had done as well, enough meat had already been killed to load the wagons. From now on, time would be doubly precious because the firing of the meat hunters would warn every wandering war party within miles of what was going on.

Accordingly he forced his way to the edge of the herd and headed back to finish off a brace of cripples. Panting from his exertions, he passed a little promontory projecting into the valley like a peninsula and noted a trio of magpies furiously abusing an unseen something. This in itself was not alarming, but when a quartet of black-eared jackrabbits came bounding, terror-stricken, down from the summit, Burton's brown-lidded eyes narrowed.

"What the devil!" His first impulse was to rein in and investigate, but a second and wiser reaction was to ride on as if he had not glimpsed a faint but ominous gleam of metal up there among the sagebushes growing so thickly along the bluff top. An un-

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trained eye would never have noticed it. He put the two cripples out of pain just as methodically as if he and the party were the only humans in the valley—which he now knew to be dangerously far from the case.

CHAPTER XII.

BURTON'S RUSE.

THOUGH the skin of Captain Robert Burton's face suddenly felt tight and dry as a drum head, he forced himself to ride leisurely back over the carcass-dotted valley floor to that point where the balance of the party were now occupied in cutting the throats of such bison as had fallen. The meat carts had already halted beside the animals first slain, and their teams were snorting and rearing at the nasty smell of hot blood.

"Um, so yer seen 'em too," Dog Soldier Nick commented as, calmly enough, he stepped back to avoid a bright stream gushing from the woolly throat of a young cow.

"Of course Long Knife, our brother, has seen." Buffalo Caller's eyes flickered toward that promontory which reared its bulk a scant quarter of a mile away. "But him good warrior so him not spread alarm like magpie."

"How did you know I saw them?"

Before making a reply, the frontiersman stooped and skillfully cut out the cow's tongue—a prime delicacy of the plains—and slipped it into his saddle bag. "Saw yer start to rein in. Never do that again, Cap'n. I only hope them Injuns yander didn't notice."

Again? Burton wished he had some of Nick's confidence.

"When them others come in and get warned," Nick drawled, his skinning knife flashing, "I figger our best stunt is to git back to the waggins mighty casual like—then, on the word, them teamsters and skinners can each grab a hoss and we'll all make a run fer it."

"Hold on, Nick." Burton, with a muscular hand reddened by the blood of the carcass he had begun to skin, beckoned the frontiersman aside. "We know the general wants this meat back at camp mighty bad—maybe there's a way to save it. Listen, down in Mexico I once worked a stunt when in a fix somethin' like this."

"Wal, spit it out—but the Pawnees and me ain't partin' with our nappers to fill no pick swingers' bellies, *sabe* that!"

Working all the while, Burton talked in rapid Pawnee to Nick and the copper-hued scouts. "Now," he concluded, "we're not goin' to say anythin' to those teamsters, not just now, anyway. Like as not they'd get right upset and maybe give the show away. Now everybody work like there were no Cheyennes inside o' fifty miles. Most likely the hostiles over yonder won't bother us right away, reckonin' they can just as well kill us after we've skinned some meat for them."

"Wagh! It is good plan. Before the sun is much higher Proud Eagle will have counted plenty coos." The nearest Pawnee smote himself on his bone and bead breast plate. "Our brother, Captain Long Knife, puts the wisdom of an old dog wolf to shame—" So saying he squatted on his heels and neatly slit the belly of a young bull which lay like a brown hummock with its blood creeping off among the sandy roots of the buffalo grass.

Pulling out his long knife which the Pawnees seemed almost to reverence.

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the ex-Confederate fought the gathering flies and also joined in the skinning operations, but from the corner of his eye he periodically studied that menacing promontory off to his left. Nothing more was to be seen, however.

FOR three hours the buffalo hunters, aided by the professional skinners, toiled and sweated beneath a broiling sun while ravens and crows gathered in gleeful anticipation. At the mouths of certain arroyos little bands of coyotes slunk impatiently back and forth, only to vanish like reddish-yellow streaks when their fears got the better of them. By ten of the morning all six forage wagons were full to overflowing and groaning beneath their pink and red cargoes.

"By Gawd, that ought to hold them hollow-bellied Micks," panted one of the skinners who, red to the elbows, brushed a fly from his forehead and left a bloody streak across it.

"Yes, sir," another spat in a heap of blue and purplish viscera, "them was mighty short rations last night. And boy, what I can do to a chunk o' that hump meat!"

"To hell with that, Jed," drawled a driver as he climbed up on the box and unwound his reins from a whip stock; "come to my monitor, I got a couple o' tongues stuck away."

"All right, boys," Burton's glance included all the sweaty brown faces of the civilians, "I've got a bit of news for you. Now don't act as if I'm sayin' anythin' out of the way— It may cost us our lives if you act scared," he cautioned when one of the younger skinners started for his carbine, which was slung in its boot from a brake handle.

"Why?" "What the hell?" "You foolin'?"

"During the last three hours we've been workin' here," he stated with enforced calm, "there's been a bunch of Sioux and Cheyenne watching us from on yonder hill."

"Gawd!" gasped the oldest teamster. "You don't mean there's a bunch of them red devils hidin' over there?"

"I mean just that. We've *got* to play it pretty—or else we'll die most unpleasantly. Now we've *got* to get this meat back, or the boys'll go mighty hungry to-night, but first I reckon we have got to lock horns with those Cheyennes. It's time they were shown they can't always jump U. P. meat hunters and come out on top. Now listen to me."

While he spoke briefly a penetrating silence ruled over this motley group of civilians, some of whom wore gory overalls, others buckskin trousers, and still others faded blue and gray pantaloons.

The meat party, Burton had calculated, numbered some twenty-five men, all told, and right now they were a frightened looking lot; not one of them but was feeling a certain unpleasant itching at the base of his scalp.

"Aw, that idee'll never work," hotly protested one of the teamsters. "I'm all for gettin' aboard a hoss and ridin' for it."

"And so am I!" "And I!"

"Don't be fools!" Burton's voice flicked out staccato as a drover's lash. "These plugs in harness may be all right for haulin' carts, but they would not stand a ghost of a chance racin' against the Cheyenne war ponies."

"Cap'n Burton's right," Dog Soldier Nick cut in abruptly. He spat viciously and swept the group with eyes suddenly hard and deadly. "And jest one o' you hombres try unhitchin' a hoss! Don't be blamed fools! Long Knife, the Pawnees and me c'n get

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away easy 'cause we're mounted right, so ye'd better listen to the cap'n."

"This is a gamble, but I reckon the odds are even—and we'll stick by you if you do *your* parts!" Burton raised his voice a little. "Now, listen, men. This detail is goin' to form up like I said and ride 'long the base of that spur."

"What? Right into their ambush? You're plumb crazy!" A freckled skinner violently shook his head.

THE long-legged figure in fringed buckskin paid no more attention than if the speaker had been one of the myriad bluebottle flies that were congregating upon those slimy heaps of entrails now dotting the valley floor. The coyotes were growing bolder, even rushing out of their arroyos to snatch some dainty from the leavings.

"We're goin' to ride right close under that ridge the Injuns are on," Burton explained, and there was again an authoritative timbre in his accents. "So close they can't see what's goin' on without showin' themselves—which I reckon they don't want to do till night. Now"— turning on his horse, he indicated brown and red canvas covers—"rig those covers, and the skinners in each cart get under them like you were tired and goin' to snooze."

"Wal, it's lucky I've raised plenty hell in my time," grumbled a middle-aged driver as he picked up the reins and placed his cocked carbine handy beside him, "'cause I figger this hyer play is a mighty pore one."

"It's all right fer you," muttered a white-lipped younger man; "but me—I—I've got a wife back in Omaha."

"Cheer up, Tom, she'll make a mighty fetchin' widder before another hour's out," called the driver of another team. Then whips cracked, axles groaned, and the six carts swung into a compact single line. As usual, the Pawnees and the two white hunters rode out to act as flankers—there could be nothing alarming in this customary procedure.

Well, for better or for worse, the attempt was under way, and Robert Burton's cheek bones were more prominent than ever when he cantered out to join Dog Soldier Nick at the head of the ambushed meat train. Harness rattled, heavily laden wagon boxes whined protestingly, and the powerful haunches of the heavy-footed draft horses quivered with effort, but the train swung slowly toward the west wall of the valley.

"G-g-gawd, I'm s-s-scared," choked a moon-faced skinner. "Wisht I was back in Vermont."

Clouds of choking dust climbed lazily skyward while the column marched steadily toward the ominous line of buttes. Presently the meat party arrived at the foot of the bluffs and, apparently unconscious of its impending doom, commenced to crawl along toward that promontory which might shelter fifty scalp-hungry Cheyennes, or a hundred for that matter. It was a nerve-racking business, and the sunburnt men on the driving seats were sweating with more than the June sun while guiding their four-horse teams around minor holes and ridges.

At a certain point the wagons, in following the line of the bluffs, dipped out of sight of the promontory, then advanced so close under the heights that one standing on them could see no details. Dust clouds, however, arose densely as ever, marking a steady advance toward the ambush.

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When the betraying column of dust had crawled directly under the foot of the promontory, it would have seemed to some one riding out on the now deserted valley floor as if the meat train had taken alarm at something; all of a sudden whips cracked like pistol shots, horses broke into a dead run and sheered away from the heights.

Still galloping, the lead team turned and swung back to form a circle, a maneuver accelerated by a fierce chorus of yells and whoops. Shots began to spatter from the heights. On a bellowed command from the head teamster the wagons halted and the teams swung to face in, out of danger. This done, the drivers jumped down from their seats and secured their plunging and badly frightened teams with practiced skill, while certain skinners opened fire with their carbines. The outriders galloped to shelter and, within two minutes of forming the ring, little could be seen of the defenders save for a hat, here and there.

"Gawd," panted the young teamster who had spoken of his wife. "Look at them devils come!"

FROM the white-eyed men crouching inside the extemporized corral burst an united groan; for, pouring out from a narrow arroyo near the head of the promontory, issued a screeching, furiously riding avalanche of mingled Sioux and Cheyennes. Perhaps seventy in number, they quirted their ponies straight at the wagon circles and brandished lances, bows and occasional rifles.

The head teamster, now crouched behind a rampart of buffalo quarters atop his wagon, tried to obey Burton's final injunction to wait until the gaudy charge was within twenty yards, but when the attackers reached the fifty-yard mark the old man's nerves could stand no more, and he yelled, "Let 'em have it!"

The inert meat shuddered under the recoil of his gun and at the roar of the teamsters' first volley the horses snorted and commenced to rear dangerously. A new note was now injected into the blood-freezing clamor of the onrushing savages, but they dashed on straight at the halted wagons, from the tops of which burst all too occasional puffs of smoke. Now and then a pony or a hideously painted brave fell, but the stupidest individual in the Cheyenne array could see that the teamsters' defense was ineffective.

"Gawd help us! We can't—stop—'em," groaned the young teamster as he sent an empty cartridge case spinning through the dazzling sunlight.

Since they were now firing at almost point blank range, the defenders' bullets became more effective, but the Cheyennes, disdaining this inaccurate fire, swerved not a foot in their charge. The savages were not ten yards from the corraled wagons, and younger braves, eager to count a *coup,* were frantically drumming their ponies' bellies with moccasined heels, when a curious thing happened. From halfway up the walls of an arroyo directly behind the charging savages there burst out the snarling crackle of well-controlled carbine fire. By twos and threes painted and befeathered marauders tumbled onto the sere buffalo grass.

"Steady, boys! Give 'em another!" Burton called from where he knelt among the dozen skinners he had caused to slip from beneath the wagon covers during that brief moment when the train had been completely hidden from the promontory.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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Jade Bells

Complete Novel

By BASSETT MORGAN

CHAPTER I.

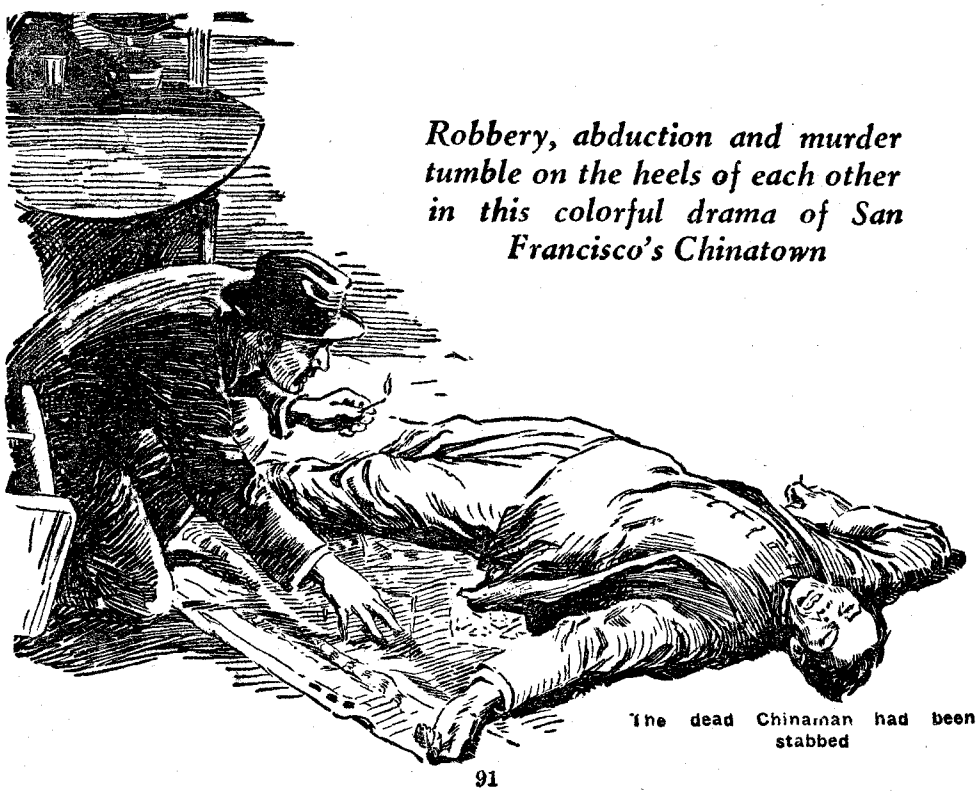
CHINATOWN'S THREAT.

WITHIN a half hour after we entered the place I realized that it had been a mistake to bring Jean to Ah Boon's Chop Suey House.

Darting glances from slant eyes and felt-soled shoes shuffling near our table had set my nerves on edge. The yellow men have long memories yet I imagined four years of absence was enough to let them forget the man who had once been chief clerk in the Samuel Strunski Importing Company, and who stood in well with old Asia Low, a power in San Francisco's Chinatown. I had been in Asia Low's rooms a score of times and through him had seen places in Chinatown undreamed of by the average citizen, nests of treasure guarded by the very shadows concealing them, as well as places of weird squalor.

Four years ago I knew the Chinese quarter as few white men do. I had even seen the dancing girls that old Chew See keeps to adorn the feasts of local mandarins. In those days the Chinks had been friendly towards me. I wondered what gave me

Robbery, abduction and murder tumble on the heels of each other in this colorful drama of San Francisco's Chinatown



The dead Chinaman had been stabbed

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that sense of surveillance and unfriendliness at Ah Boon's joint.

The Chinks had no grievance against me and I surmised it was curiosity about a man who had lost four years of life that made them slyly attentive, but their glances seemed to smirch the sweetness of Jean. No Chinese rests his gaze on a woman of his own race unless she is a sing-song girl or one of the "linnets" of that noseless old character of underworld life, Chew See.

It's odd how a nice girl like Jean is thrilled by an adventure into sordid surroundings. Jean exclaimed about the dragons and tinsel decorations. Her eyes seemed to reflect the gold paint as she gazed around while our tea and chow mien cooled. We had been to dinner and a movie where we held hands in the darkness and I suggested something to eat. Jean asked for a Chinese dish and after four years behind the gray walls of San Quentin through which her faith in my innocence had never wavered, I could refuse her nothing I was able to afford.

I suppose she never understood what "coming back" meant to me, a chance to clear my name of the stigma of crime. In spite of letters from her I was not too sure things would be the same between us nor would I have blamed Jean for trying to forget me. Instead, for two months we had been happy together at shows, dances, little suppers and Sundays in Golden Gate Park, all the entertainment I could supply on the wages I was getting as clerk in an Oakland store.

Selfish? Of course. Most men are about the only girl. But I needed her. A good many times I might have run amuck in reality during those two months of freedom only for Jean's belief that I was innocent of the Jade Bells crime. I needed her faith to keep me from gunning for the crook who sent me over. I needed her to remind me that I was not the only one wronged and that old Samuel Strunski's heart nearly broke at the loss of the Jade Bells for which he had refused small fortunes in good cash many times.

My conviction hurt two people beside myself: Samuel, who gave me my first job as a kid lighting Sabbath fires for the orthodox Jewish people of his neighborhood and later a job in his importing company, and Jean, who is a cuddlesome, red-headed spitfire.

Ah Boon's place smelled of years of hot grease, food, tobacco and incense. The old dragons appeared blue through the smoke but the food is fairly good. I enjoyed watching Jean's teeth bite at honeyed limes not as sweet as her lips. On her side of the table was an alcove telephone booth which had a sliding panel where the initiated could obtain certain small bundles of the stuff of dreams and idiocy.

I REMEMBERED the night when Poppy Sanders went into that booth and was found later with a sharpened knitting needle in her heart. Lots of queer things had happened at Ah Boon's joint. The memory of them came crowding back. I was a fool to bring Jean.

"Tell me, have you found track of George Bullant?" she asked.

"Soft pedal that name here, honey," I said to her. "It's safer not to mention names. The man who wanted those bells is a king in Chinatown. Perhaps he got them. I don't know. Old Samuel said they had been stolen from some ancient temple and Asia Low wanted to get hold of them to restore to the temple. I don't think Samuel would have parted with them until he died but he and Asia Low were good friends and Asia Low wanted the Jade Bells like I want you."

"Jack, have you any hope of finding them?" she asked.

"Very little," I admitted, "yet finding them would clear me of what they said I did. Not that I want them. It's dangerous to possess some things. All I ask is proof that I did not take the Bells. For my own sake I don't give a damn. It's for you, Jean, so when we go to a preacher you won't feel ashamed . . ."

She said a lot of nice things after that and had me so spellbound that I forgot my first uneasiness as well as the time o' night.

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When I did think of it and looked at my watch I jumped and grabbed her coat from the chair-back.

"You'll loose your dimples keeping such late hours, Jean, and I've already lost the last Alameda ferry. I'll have to take the news boat over," I said. I wasn't regretting it, for after the dinner, show and late supper only a few cents jingled in my pocket and I wanted Jean to have a taxi ride home.

"Jack," she said when we were outside, "don't take the long trip home with me. Just get me a taxi and then run for your boat or you'll have to stay at a hotel on this side. And you know why we need to save money. I've had a lovely time and I'll cat-nap in the taxi all the way home."

I stepped into the telephone booth to call a taxi and held the door curtain aside to keep my eyes on Jean. Her face above the fur collar of her coat was heart-shaped, her hair was a band of shining color under her hat. I've told her her nose got that way from powdering it so often. Three little freckles on it dance when she laughs and she holds a job in the Aids to Beauty department at Maison Blanc because the Lord made her in one of His loving moods. She had to make her way since she was sixteen and has brains. Where she boards they treat her like one of the family which is a fair recommendation for any girl and the reason for what happened.

On that night I felt extra lucky because she offered to go alone in the taxi while I caught the boat that carries first morning editions across the Bay. She knew I needed a couple of hours' sleep to be enthusiastic about my job in the morning, but I was a fool about it for the second time that night.

I had just got the telephone number when a waiter gathered up our dishes, unusually prompt for an Ah Boon chop suey slinger. Not that I took warning. Jean and I strolled down the street to the corner where Sing Fat's windows were bright with embroidered silks, ivories, lacquer, jades and a string of carved elephants. There was also an assortment of crystal balls big and little.

"WHAT do those balls remind you of?" Jean asked.

For many reasons they remind me of George Bullant who had steered me up to have Madame Olga read my fortune. Silly stuff, maybe, but I was eighteen and George was thirty; he was Strunski's manager also, which counted. In the anteroom where I waited while George let Madame Olga hold his hand and tell him things, sat Jean with cheeks glowing from excitement and eyes like stars. Our eyes meet and Jean's eyes speak. She can't help it. It wasn't a minute until my eyes asked questions. You know how things start from a girl's eyes answering the glance from a man's. That night I took Jean to a show.

In the meantime Madame Olga held my hand and I almost forgot Jean in the other room on account of that she-devil inside the velvet hung room. The lights had pink shades. The incense was thick enough to suffocate you. Olga was dressed to show off her extraordinary beauty and her voice flowed like smooth cream.

I don't remember what she saw in my hands but I do recall that she had plenty of chance to take impressions of all my digits on the sheet of black wax that covered her table.

At the trial where I was convicted and given four years, I realized that I was led like a lamb to slaughter—framed.

God! when I remember how they proved my finger prints were on the safe where Strunski kept the Jade Bells, and heard Olga give testimony that my hands showed the lines of a pilferer, I cursed myself for that night's foolishness . . . except for Jean whom I might not have met in any other way. It was worth four years of prison to find a girl like her. But anyway Madame Olga had a crystal ball which she didn't gaze into on my account. The balls in Sing Fat's window reminded me of her and took some joy from the night. Thinking of Olga I see red. She is more than plausible. Her palm-reading is innocent enough; she doesn't prophesy, merely reminds you of the good, the true, the beautiful until you shove out your chest and take heart.

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I had not a doubt that she and George Bullant split the income from the Jade Bells. Olga, who claims she is a Russian Grand Duchess, was living in Piedmont and Bullant still held his job with Samuel Strunski. I was the goat.

"Jack," said Jean to me that night, "I blame myself for admitting on the witness stand that I met you at Olga's that night. I should have disappeared. Then you could say you hadn't been there and make her out the liar she proved to be in other things."

"Honey, that's past and forgotten," I said. "I am starting from where it stands right now. Here comes the taxi and I oughtn't even to kiss you goodnight on a street corner, but I'll make up for it tomorrow night . . ."

It's a wonder Fate didn't nudge my elbow for a statement like that considering what it was preparing for Jean and me!

The street corner at that hour was no place to air regrets so I handed Jean into the taxi and said her street and number to the man who was driving it. She kissed her fingers to me as I turned away and hurried down Grant Street to Market to catch a Third Street car which would land me near the pier where the news boat lay moored. I was whistling a tune to which we had danced that night and thinking of Jean. Being in love does things as profound as China's poppy to a man. Without thinking I hopped on the first car that came along headed toward the Ferry Building and only remembered when I was aboard it that I needed the Third Street car.

God knows I need all my time, wits and money to get by, run the Jade Bells to earth, clear my name and marry Jean. And here I go, squandering every dollar on shows and dinners so I can't afford to take a taxi for myself, and to crown stupidity jump on a car that lands me a mile from my destination.

But I kept on whistling that song that seemed particularly appropriate to the case of Jean and me:

"I wonder if I keep on pra-aying
Will your dreams be the same . . ."

Believe me, I prayed in earnest before that night's darkness gave way to dawn.

CHAPTER II.

THE MISSING COAT.

ABOVE the tule fog blowing in over the China Basin, lights on tall standards along the Embarcadero seemed cold, blue and aloof from the shadowy forms of night-prowling citizens. There are dark affairs afoot between those long warehouses of the waterfront where human derelicts sleep on the freight heaped wharves. By day there is a certain romance in the spicy smells of coffee and pepper cargoes, Oregon fir and the sounds of hearty stevedore language and rumbling trucks; but by night it isn't so wholesome.

If I had not wanted to save a dollar taxi fare I'd never have taken that stroll from the Ferry Building. Penny wise and a million scads foolish! Yet I shiver even now to think that I might not have been on hand. The little gods that mock men grinned that night at me.

I can't say why, of the shadows that slipped past stirring a swirl in the thick white fog, I saw one in particular. Two piers from the wharf where the news boat lay there was a gleam of black water through a hole in the moisture. Something darted by me towards the wharf edge and vanished. There was no splash; nothing but the lap-lap of water against teredo-bitten and barnacle whitened piling. But I had certainly seen a skirt!

A woman overboard? I started on the double towards the place where she vanished and dug out my pocket flash. Its round finger of light showed oily, uneasy water but nothing floating. Nor had there been a cry. I still heard nothing except faint thuds under the wharf that might have been a bit of wood bumping the piling.

Yet behind me were padded-soles hurrying almost noiselessly.

Some men observe physiognomies and some glue their gaze on hands, others re-

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member mannerisms. I happened to know footsteps and I've learned most of them from the thump of carefree indifference to the toe-slouch of a man that's getting away from something he dreads. Footsteps have tonal character varying with temperament, moods and races of men. I know the slithery gait of an Oriental and I know how hard it is to slough off the trick of the lock-step after the big gray gates open and release a man. I know!

The steps I heard in the fog were neither honest, made by leather, nor a white man's tread. They went deeper into the gloom. Something had stood where the fog thinned from a draught of wind between the warehouses, and somebody ran away on padded feet leaving my little electric wand searching the crinkling black water where the tide coiled below.

The water looked black and forbidding. To dive without a visual objective seemed more violent than valiant. My urge was to yell to whatever went overside. Instead I slid off my shoes and overcoat and made a heap of them on the wharf edge. A truck was rumbling nearer, headed in my direction. Still no head bobbed where I was sure one had gone down. Yet moving the flash I saw a ladder leading down.

IN three more seconds I had descended half way. The flash shone on oily water and ancient piles winking with wet sea slugs, also a skiff and in that small boat crouched a motionless figure. The relentless little flashlight picked it out, a cloth coat, a fur collar, a white cheek, a band of bright hair, the white terrified face of my Jean!

She couldn't see me, for which I was glad just an instant. Put yourself in my place hanging with one hand to a rickety ladder on the Embarcadero wharf and discovering the girl you love and had kissed good-by as she started home, crouched in a leaking boat under that wharf, with horror in her eyes.

The voice that had crooned that love-song " Charmaine " as we danced so short a while ago lifted in a screech of fear that ended in a gasp as the boat, already half filled with water, slopped a little more and threatened to sink.

" Honey," I said, trying to speak so she wouldn't be more terrified, " shove out here. You know it's me, don't you?"

" Jack!" she wailed and her voice sort of creaked. My own heart thumped. The water is thirty feet at low tide there.

She shoved along the piling till she was near enough for me to grab her and climb the ladder.

" That Chink," she gasped.

I guessed right about those footsteps padding away in the fog; they were felt-soled Chinese shoes.

Jean had been crouching in the water-filled boat and was soaked to the waist. She shuddered and her teeth chattered as I reached the top of the ladder and heard a flock of honest leather boot-soles come jigging over the cement and the lumbering truck came to a stop with a squeal of brakes. The morning editions had arrived. Great bundles of them fell with a stolid thump and the boys from the boat were running to load them on board. A larger searchlight than my little flash was feeling around through the fog.

My one desire was to hide. You can't have the name of a girl like Jean featured in the morning headlines for being hauled from under a wharf near Pier Forty-seven by Jack Duncan, ex-convict, and so on. Jean was sobbing with hysteria in hard, gasping sounds as we waited until the flash moved away. I hauled her top-side and streaked away without waiting for even my coat or shoes. I was carrying Jean and running on my toes.

Near the street-end we almost collided with a man dashing up to satisfy curiosity, I figured, since there is no great attraction in the news boat pulling out at that dark hour.

The fog was thicker, woollier, wetter than ever. When I let Jean slip to her own feet she wobbled on her high heels.

" Where are we going?" she whispered.

" To a safe place for you, honey," was all I said.

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Instead of heading for a street car at the Ferry Building or a chance at catching a stray taxi on Market Street I was taking her to Mother Villiston's boarding house for sailors. Mother Villiston and I are friends. A good many curio stores buy pearl beads and curios smuggled in by sailors, deckhands and engineers from Mother Villiston and the Oakland store where I worked got the best selection of them.

THE shortest way to her house that night was over the railroad switchback, through a few dark alleys, past lumber piles, but we were not long getting there because I kept Jean stepping.

There was no time for her to talk and I surmised what she would have to say needed privacy.

I am acquainted with Mother Villiston's back door. Anyway, it was no hour to ring a bell and wake the boarders. I know which is the old lady's room also and have seen its spotless shabbiness, cheerful with a bouquet of red geraniums and a canary singing in a brass cage as well as a red and green parrot on a perch. The whole house is scoured so clean it looks raw, and the yard is gay with marigolds and geraniums. Mother Villiston still wears skirts to her ankles and has scallops on her white petticoats. Long braids of yellow hair now turning white are wound around her head.

When I tapped on her door that night it opened and the light flashed on. She was pulling a courduroy robe over a flannel nightgown and jabbing her feet into loose slippers. Pink color came into her milk-white cheeks when she saw Jean, who clung to me and was as limp in my arms as her own wet clothing.

"Mother Villiston, look after Jean for me, will you?"

"For sure," she said before I had time to explain. "Fetch her in. You want I should take care of her awhile?"

"Till morning. You'll hear from me then. It's all right, honey," I told Jean. "I left my coat and shoes. I'll get them and be right back. Stay here till I come."

Jean was crying again and I left her knowing that if she talked it would be safe with Mother Villiston. She knows all about me and why George Bullant took a vacation in the Orient after my conviction. She knows how often innocent men have taken the gaff. Her husband, Captain Villiston, was broken because Chinks were smuggled on his ship though he knew nothing about it. Being on the beach after forty years as honorable master of a big vessel broke his heart and killed him in a few months.

Only as I hurried away from Mother Villiston's did I regret not asking Jean the meaning of what had happened. To tell the truth I dreaded hearing what she would say. I didn't doubt her being the sweet kid I'd always found her, but to my knowledge she knew nothing about the wharf and had no intention in the world of being there when I had put her in the taxi a few minutes before. What occurred wasn't damaging my love for her; in fact it brought her a little nearer the ex-convict she was willing to love and marry; I knew she could have had men without my background.

IT took longer to return to the wharf where I had left my shoes and coat because my thoughts were speeded up and my feet lagged as a result. I wouldn't invite investigation by a cop who might see me running. But when I arrived at Pier Forty-seven the truck was gone, so were the news boat and crowd, and so were my coat and shoes! I used the flashlight and a kid carrying papers came out of the fog and handed me the shoes.

"You must have left 'em," he said, looking at my socks.

"Thanks, buddy. And did you see a coat beside them?"

"Nope. Just the kicks. I wasn't here when things started. When I dashed up they was just takin' pictures of the guy that fished that dame from the briny."

"What?" I asked. "Who fished who from the briny?"

"Some dame tried to commit suicide an' a guy pulled her out. The newshounds off

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the boat snapped his pitcher. He was lyin' like hell, too. It wasn't five minutes before that I sold him a paper and he was in a hurry to catch the news boat. He beat it just before I got here an' he sure had nerve. You oughta hear the yarn he told 'em. Maybe he was lit up and he fell in and climbed out. His name was Jack Duncan because he pulled some papers out of his overcoat pocket and showed the news reporters. Say . . ." an idea had occurred to the kid, "you was looking for an overcoat, you said?" He stared at me in frank curiosity.

"Not now," I told him and cheerfully handed over all my change but the fare to Alameda which was twenty-one cents. The kid had done me a good deed, but changed my plans. I legged it to the Ferry Building, mentally calling the guy who swiped news notoriety I was anxious to avoid some harsh names. I needed my overcoat. He was probably the man I had almost collided with in the fog and he'd seen enough to prompt him to tell that yarn. He had quick wit to dive into my overcoat pockets and haul out the name of the owner in time to use it.

THE newsy, trotting alongside, ignored by me, was chatting about the picture taking at the news boat and dropped a remark that registered, oblivious as I had been and sunk in my own troubles.

"If you're crossin' the Bay it's too bad you didn't catch the news boat. Then you'd of seen the guy that got your overcoat. He went on it."

"The ferry'll have to do me," I said, but my brain was spinning. Jean under the wharf was put aside for the moment. The address of the little waterfront shack that I rented along the Alameda shore was in that overcoat along with my name. The man wearing the coat would arrive on the other side two hours ahead of the ferry. No doubt the news-hounds had the address by this time.

My spirits were at the cipher and the gray dawn was due to begin breaking, a bleak hour after a night out. I ceased splitting my brain wondering about Jean and the Chink she feared sneaking through the fog. A more or less marked man I ambled through the ferry turnstile and sat down to wait for the first boat, picturing a man in my little rented house, perhaps searching through my belongings.

I tried to remember what there was I didn't want a stranger to find and hoped as the kid said he was just "lit" and perhaps would help himself to crackers and cheese, make his own coffee and clear out.

But in the desk of the house was a bundle of letters written by Jean to me when I was behind stone walls. There was also data I had gathered concerning Madame Olga and George Bullant, and something about the stolen Jade Bells. There were names of Strunski's customers who had seen and gloated over the bells and tried to buy the necklace from the old importer. Every one who saw them yearned to possess those bits of translucent green light that had once adorned the throat of a brooding golden Buddha in an ancient Eastern temple.

I cursed myself for leaving the note book instead of keeping it on me. I was tired and cold and hungry, and the mystery of Jean was taking the heart out of me in spite of loving her and trying to have the same faith in her that she had in me and not succeeding because I'm not made of the fine stuff that went into the heart and mind of Jean.

The news-kid followed me into the Ferry Building and handed me a morning paper.

"I just got this one. It's last minute stuff."

At my first glance at the headlines, I almost keeled over. On the front page glared at me:

TAXI DRIVER STABBED
BY WOMAN FARE

William Moore, called to Hop Chuck Alley for a woman passenger, was found unconscious in his cab on Clay Street. Only clue woman's handbag found in cab.

Jean had got into the taxi at Hop Chuck

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Alley and her way home would take the taxi through Clay Street!

CHAPTER III.

DEAD CHINAMAN.

AFTER that I wasn't sleepy or cold. The forty-five minute trip across the Bay was all too short to consider things. As sure as God made little apples, Jean's handbag was the one found in William Moore's taxi. His picture was in the paper and I recognized it. Undoubtedly he had seen Jean and me by the light of Sing Fat's windows. He could identify us both. I remembered him perfectly, a slim man about thirty-five, dark-haired and sort of friendly.

"I'll get the lady home safely," he had said to me.

I felt sorry for William Moore. And I began to realize that the accursed Jade Bells were at the bottom of this night's adventure. I wished I'd been twins so one of me could have been with Jean asking the thousands of questions that were now as important as the one Jean had answered to my satisfaction when I asked her to marry me.

The first thing pressing me was to reach home and to keep Jean out of the mess. I knew only too well that you don't need to be guilty to take punishment. Jean didn't carry a knife and she could not have stabbed a fly, but they had found her purse and God knew what it contained beside lipstick and powder and beauty aids. The taxi driver would remember the address we gave him. If she went home the police would gather her in.

I had to get her word that she mustn't leave Mother Villiston. I had to leave or miss a boat; there was no time to telephone. Yesterday the biggest thing in my life had been to get track of the Jade Bells, clear my name and hand it to Jean. This morning Jean was under the black shadow of crime and it was cast by the Jade Bells which she had never seen. The more I conned it over the more I realized the need of locating the Bells. And it began to percolate through my mind that somebody suspected I had taken them and still knew where they were hidden.

There was the mysterious undercurrent in Ah Boon's dive, the covert glances of Chinese veiled by the appearance of indifference. I had been recognized. Word flickered by mute secret telegraph in Chinatown that Jack Duncan who had stolen the Jade Bells, was loose again. The Chink who frightened Jean proved that the source of this mysterious chain of events was Chinatown, perhaps Asia Low himself, living in his gorgeous quarters deep in and high up above the warrens.

Until then I hadn't figured him in. Whoever got the Bells might have sold them to him and retired rich. George Bullant knew that. But if Chinatown suspected I had them and would bring them to light eventually, it proved Asia Low didn't have them. I wished I could get a word with Asia Low if only to ask him to call his shadows away from Jean. But there was no time that morning to run over to Chinatown because of this business of Jean and the taxi driver.

It may seem trifling but my job was important to me also. When I came outside there was a dreary, disheartening search for work before I found it. I had to exist. I had to have a presentable appearance to be seen with Jean and I was glad to get the clerk's wages. The streets were full of job-hunters, and the reason I got the place was my friendship with Mother Villiston, from whom I could get sailors' bargains

It's all very well in stories to discount the grind for daily bread and butter and a roof over your head. My goal was respectability for Jean's sake.

THE little Ark on the Alameda shore is in a respectable neighborhood of old houses with deep lots on the Bay where the small cottages on stilts embedded in the tide flats rent at a reasonable figure. I wondered what was happening in it as I hung around the engine room windows on the ferry. When she landed I caught the

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electric train. Before it reached the Chestnut station I heard the newsies hollering: "Woman drowned in the Bay!"

Hurrying home through the gray darkness lingering because of the fog, I walked on the grass instead of the gravel path leading through the Kimmerly yard to my house and fitted the key in the lock. It is entered from the kitchen and the living room looks over the water. Inside the door I stumbled on a fire-screen knocked over since I left it. My skin prickled. I struck a match and saw the litter of overturned tables and chairs, a broken flower vase, my desk open.

Half expecting such a scene, the reality started my heart pounding as it did the day I was arrested for the theft of those double-damned Jade Bells. I dared not turn on a light for fear some early rising neighbor would see the house lighted and note the time. A cool moist wind touched my face from an open window over the bay.

Lighting a second match I saw the rent money I had placed in the desk was gone. Every pigeonhole had been emptied, newspaper clippings and papers littered the floor. But the black note-book lay on the blotter. I grabbed it and ran my fingers through the pages and it fell from my limp hands. There were bloody fingerprints on the pages. This was a worse scare than when they took me to Headquarters four years ago. Blood stains meant a grimmer crime, especially for a man who has done time. God! the presentiment of cold metal clamped my wrists again. The dread of Friday mornings when some poor devil mounted the thirteen steps came over me and I was mounting them and a chaplain was chanting as I went to hell!

The bloody fingerprints put fear into my heart and I crouched as if eyes stared through the windows, though the house through which I slunk, feeling along the walls, was dark when the match went out. A sluggish wind stirred the window curtain somberly and carried the stench of the tide flats and clammy touch of fog. I started across the room to close the window and stumbled. I yelped, unable to throttle the cry in time.

Jerking the chintz curtains across the window I almost yelled again at the bony rattling of curtain rings on the rod. Another match flame shielded by my hands showed what I had tripped over. My hunched body sank to one knee as I stared at a Chinese lying on the rug, still warm but dead as Methuselah.

He'd been stabbed; his blood soaked into the rug. Sightless eyes rolled until only the yellow-colored balls were visible with an edge of black like mourning quarter moons at the upper lids. I don't know what prompted me to go through his pockets; there were cigarette papers and "makings," matches, loose silver and one folded paper brushed with black ideograms.

ON the wall my shadow flickered, crooked with fear that warped body and mind out of shape, and to escape the wry thing I pinched out the match flame. I should call the police, but I dared not. I had no telephone; my calls across the Bay to Jean were charged on my landlord's bill because I phoned her from his house, and if the police checked my record they would connect her with Jack Duncan, ex-convict. With the stabbing affair in the taxi there was enough to send her where I had been.

Cold to the heart, shaking, I pictured Jean facing trial and the wealth of circumstantial evidence.

A dead Chink in my house. God! I could see people crowd the little shack looking at *it*, looking at me. My thoughts whirled, but out of the chaos came the dank touch of moist wind and the moan of the fog siren on Alcatraz. The dark curtains were sucked outward and a rift of gray gloom pointed the next step I must take.

Captain Kimmerly kept a boathook on my porch for spearing driftwood that fed his fireplace and mine. Four minutes after I stumbled over the dead Chinese the body was rocking face down on the out-going

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tide water, and I thrust it away with the handle of the boathook, guiding it to the outward flow. My eyes ached with staring, watching the lifeless thing sway in a sea choppy from the dawn wind that already thinned the fog.

Over the Berkeley hills the sun came up red, as bloody as I felt. I straightened the room and washed the rug, soaking it with peroxide on both sides, and dried it with an electric heater from the bathroom. A cold plunge in the tub and hot coffee didn't take long, and I was out as usual at seven-thirty on my way to the street car.

Waiting for it I felt as if every acquaintance who nodded or spoke eyed me and could read on my guilty face that I was Jack Duncan of the Jade Bells affair. I longed to grab a boat and beat it out and far away. To crown my misery the car was late; an open bridge over the estuary had delayed the service, and I cursed that town of Alameda for being on an island. To kill time I dashed into the drug store opened early for commuter trade and called Mother Villiston.

"Jack speaking," I said. "How's everything?"

"Fine. Off to work already," came back to me.

"God! I said to keep her there . . ."

"All right. Call me later." And the phone clicked.

I was too late to prevent Jean reporting at Maison Blanc that morning, too late to catch her en route and couldn't get the store till nine o'clock.

HOPPING the first car that came, I reached East Fourteenth Street in Oakland and found the bookkeeper where I worked holding a bridge party post mortem on the telephone. She played over every hand of a long session the night before without missing a card, although she knew I wanted to use the telephone after the seventh time I had stood in the door hinting without words.

There are times when murder is justifiable. I was ready to swear that the poor Chink whose body ebbed with the tide didn't deserve death half as much as that dame whose throat I wanted to squeeze before she ended her conversation and gave me a chance to call Maison Blanc.

It seemed to me my voice sounded funny. I know I shivered while the switchboard got Jean's department.

"Miss Winters is not here to-day," was all the satisfaction I obtained.

What had happened to Jean? Had she walked into a police net spread for suspects? I called Mother Villiston again and got no answer. She was usually out at that hour marketing for her boarders. A customer came in and asked to see mandarin coats and an hour went by before I got to the telephone again. It happened to be a busy morning. I tried to sell cheap brass opium bowls and dragon pillows while imagination scrawled on them the image of a dead Chink rocking in the Bay waters and Jean in the hands of a burly San Francisco police officer. I could see the fear in her eyes as they showed her the small bead bag that had betrayed her, with its poor little aids to beauty scattered on the desk at a precinct station, perhaps headquarters.

By noon I was cold and couldn't have swallowed anything like food. Perhaps a walk in the sun might clear my brain of terror that gripped with feverish claws.

Grabbing my hat I went to the office to call Mother Villiston again. The receiver was at my ear when some one darkened the open door of the office and I looked up.

My hand grasped the desk to steady my body, which swayed. In the doorway stood a police officer in uniform!

CHAPTER IV.

"FLY FROM EVIL."

FOOTSTEPS coming towards me, stolidly thudding. I can still hear them as I heard them that day. I see him yet, two hundred odd pounds of brawn with the weight of the law behind him. He looked at me. I was seeing a lifeless body floating in the Bay.

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"Come on," he said. "I'm in a hurry."

It's a wonder I didn't hold out my wrist for his bracelets. The idea that a guilty conscience betrays a man is sound.

"I have to call the coroner," he added.

That information gave a respite in which I lighted a cigarette and asked if there had been an accident. He said a body had been found on the Bay shore. He was sending for a mortuary wagon and it appeared to be a case for the coroner. Omitting the mention of that word *murder* saved a crowd gathering, of course.

I went into the sunshine and kept going, fighting an urge to take the first train to the mole on my way to San Francisco; it would not do to make a false move now. I bought a noon paper to read on a street car and learned from it that the police were searching for the owner of a beaded handbag found in William Moore's taxi. They expected to make an arrest before night.

There was another item that interested me: Madame Olga, a fingerprint expert, whose work was well known around the Bay in crime detection cases, had been robbed in the night by a sneak-thief who entered the house while she was entertaining friends. No clues were found.

Things seemed to be warming up fast. I was in the mood to find Jean and stow away with her on board a tramp vessel that had no wireless, and thinking of its temporary safety gave me an idea. I couldn't face the clerk job that afternoon, so I got off the car and telephoned my boss that a vessel was in and I might pick up some Jap pearls if I hurried over. He said to go ahead.

It was taking a big risk. If I was wanted he'd say I had started for San Francisco and mention Mother Villiston's house, though he wouldn't give away that address unless forced to do so; contraband is against the law and he carried plenty of it.

Then I took a street car that carried me to Piedmont, where Madame Olga lived in a pretty bungalow with green lawns and flowers. Strolling past, I saw a chauffeur washing her car. I walked in and asked for a match, intending to mention the burglary casually, but one look at his jaw decided me against it.

My nerve was breaking, and I remembered I had eaten nothing since the chop suey at Ah Boon's around midnight, except the hot coffee I imbibed at my own house at seven in the morning. The afternoon was going when I reached the ferry, and it was half gone when I arrived through the railroad switchback at Mother Villiston's house. I didn't wait to knock at the door. Opening it, I stepped into the kitchen and found her making pies. There was pot-roast cooking, and the smell of it made me hungry.

"Where is she?" I said quietly.

Her eyes warned me. "Hello," she said. "You'll have to wait till I finish this pie. I got a new girl working for me today and I haven't got her trained to do things my way yet. It's quite a bother teaching new help." She held up a pie and cut the extra crust, then made a pattern around the edge with a fork. She popped it in the oven and stalked away. When the door opened again I jumped. The "new girl" was in my arms. In a blue cotton dress, a cap and apron setting off her prettiness, I found Jean.

BUT in those few hours since midnight she was changed from a happy kid to a woman with fear haunted eyes and cheeks that wore two burning red spots instead of yesterday's peach-bloom.

"Jack," she whispered against my lips. "They think I committed murder."

In another minute she was sobbing in hysteria. Mother Villiston came running. All I could do was to catch Jean tight and smother her shuddering sobs against my shoulder so no one would hear and wonder what was wrong.

"Take her upstairs," said Mother Villiston.

I carried her as a man carries the woman he loves. The canary in Mother Villiston's room was singing to burst his throat. The parrot was cursing cheerfully in three languages while I managed to quiet Jean and get a little of her adventure.

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Jean said she had been sitting in the taxi thinking of me when it stopped at a corner on Clay Street to let a street car go through the intersection. Somebody jumped on the running board. He jerked open the door and slid inside. Jean screamed and the driver turned his head to see her. A man's arm swung and the driver groaned.

Jean said she thought of kidnapers first of all, and while the stranger was tugging at the driver, evidently dragging out his knife, she lunged past him out of the door. He tried to grab her. His hand touched her cheek as she broke away. The taxi driver had slumped under the wheel. Her cheek felt wet, and touching it, her fingers were wet. Then she knew it was blood and the taxi driver had been stabbed. All that happened in very few seconds, though it takes longer to tell it.

Jean was terrified. She saw the murderous stranger leap from the cab as she started running down Kearney Street, which leads to Third. She remembered that I would go that way to catch the news boat. The thin soles of her slippers made very little sound and a passing street car gave her a break as she ran on, too excited to think of anything but finding me at the wharf. She had been there with me on one Sunday stroll when we sniffed at the spice smells and said how good it would be to go across the Pacific and see spice growing.

Hearing the padding steps of her pursuer coming nearer, Jean lost her head. The fog prevented her seeing much, but she remembered the ladder leading down to the water and a boat tied there for emergency use. There I found her.

Her story was simple, but it took time for me to hear it, and further precious time to comfort her. She had read the papers that morning.

"Don't worry," I said, "even if your bag was found in the taxi you didn't stab William Moore, and he isn't dead yet. Perhaps he will live."

"But if he lives he can give them my address," she argued.

"Listen, honey," I said, "we don't want the guy to slip over even to save us a lot of bother. You leave everything to me. I'll fix this for both of us."

What else could I say? Jean trusted me.

"Don't you dare even try to fix anything," she came back at me. "They'll get you again as they did before when you were innocent. I can't go on living if you have to serve time again, Jack. I can't go to the store and I can't go home. What will I do?" And she cried again in a way that made me quiver inside.

IT was supper time before I left her, worn out with crying, but strangely game in spite of tears. She wanted to go to headquarters and tell her story. It took Mother Villiston and me both to fight down that idea. Mother Villiston made her help set the table and work in the kitchen to keep her from doing anything worse.

I left the house still thinking of the dead Chink who would be at the morgue by now. I felt as if his ghost slithered along at my shoulder. Perhaps it did, because without planning a course I eased down California Street towards the Paulist church where black words on the illuminated dial of the tower clock warn everybody "My son, consider the time and flee from evil."

I had seen the warning hundreds of times, but that night it registered meaningly. Five minutes to ten and I was flying from evil like a fox with the hounds closing in, nowhere to go. It was the last night of the Feast of Lanterns and the streets were crowded. Brown, yellow and white faces slipped past like coins in the dark melting-pot of Chinatown, blurred by falling rain. Wet pavements reflected automatic electric colors that crawled in dragons on satiny black cements. Shop windows blazed light and colors and in the doorway of the Golden River Bazaar stood Billy Kim, son of old Kim Wo.

Billy supported a cigarette drooping from one corner of his mouth and let the corner of the doorway support him. He is American born, and a jazz-hound, but he knows his Chinese onions, and he has

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known me for some years. On that night his glance slipped like quicksilver over me and his cigarette rose two points higher.

"Hello, Billy," I said as I slipped alongside. "How are chances to see the sights to-night?"

On the Feast of Lanterns the Chinese keep open house just as they do at New Years. Billy Kim was friendly enough to lead me through the bazaar to a back room furnished luxuriously, where he poured colorless drinks from a blue stone jar lettered in black brushed ideograms. It was good ware, as I knew, because I had picked up a good deal of ceramic lore at Strunski's in the old days before the Jade Bells disappeared.

"A rat in the bin, a woman on the street and a priest in the house are the beginning of destruction," was the way I translated the jar label.

"And On Wing Low on the street in the rain with his gunmen also leads to trouble," said Billy Kim. "I was watching the old pot-belly as you came along. Have another drink. Where are you working now, Duncan?"

"Nowhere this evening, Billy," I replied.

"Did you get a chance at Strunski's again?" he asked, waving me to one chair and sliding into another with his leg over the arm. He looked at me through smoke from his cigarette. Samuel Strunski got his best stuff from the Golden River Bazaar and Billy opened conversation with that lead. He is a good scout even if he is also the sorrow of Kim Wo's life because he refuses to marry one of the few lily-footed house-birds in Chinatown and settle down to running the Golden River Bazaar.

"You were a fool not to take those Jade Bells to Asia Low," he said. "He would have shipped you East until the fuss had blown over and he'd have made things right with Strunski."

"Billy, if I ever had had the cursed Bells, knowing Asia Low as well as I did, I'm not idiot enough to keep him from having them and do time for it. The only time I ever flirted with temptation was when I saw Asia Low look at me with his eyes asking me to get him the Bells. He'd have adopted me as his son if I had. But Samuel Strunski was good to me when I was a kid. And I did not take the Bells then or ever."

BILLY remained silent for a minute or two while I sipped another drink of fiery liquor, then he said:

"George Bullant won't last much longer at Strunski's."

"Why?" I wanted to know.

"In fact," he went on, ignoring my interruption, "if On Wing Low has luck to-night, Bullant is through."

"On with the rat-killing," I suggested, aching now for further information. Billy Kim is college educated and thinks white on most things, but when he is pondering deeply he is all Chinese as was his mood that night. I tried again:

"On Wing Low is out in the rain, all wet?"

"Asia Low would pay well for those Bells," he urged again, ignoring my question. "And I imagine George Bullant would rather have a trip through the Orient than land in hell. You see, Duncan, old Chew See has an extra lovely linnet in her cages, a dancing girl from Pengyang whom she holds for top prices, many top prices."

The news of a new dancing girl owned my the noseless old Chew See did not cheer me.

"What have On Wing Low, linnets, and George Bullant's Oriental trip got to do with me and the Jade Bells?" I asked.

The liquor from the blue stone jar was powerful, and though enough of it made me feel generously inclined to bestow San Francisco on some needy orphanage, I wasn't fuzzy-headed yet.

"Have another drink," said Billy. "You know that George Bullant keeps an expensive house in Piedmont, and lives like a mandarin himself, and you can bet he doesn't do it on the salary paid by Samuel Strunski. Well, the answer is 'snow.' Bullant and Ah Boon work together."

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"So that's it!" I straightened in my chair and set down the cup of "courage."

"Bullant eats some of his own profits and that has led him to take an interest in Chew See's Pengyang dancer. The girl is already famous. Also, On Wing Low has a nice taste in dancing girls; he keeps two gunmen and his patience is limited."

In spite of my former gloom, in spite of falling rain outside, and the fact that Billy Kim turned out the shaded light and left only a tiny blue flame floating on the wick in a golden dish of oil for lighting cigarettes, I felt brighter.

The little flame stood upright and did not waver, which proved there were no draughts of air, consequently no doors except the one by which we entered, and no eavesdroppers.

"If Bullant were threatened by death he might say where the Jade Bells are hidden. Bullant wants the Pengyang girl on whom On Wing Low has set envious eyes. He has not the price to compete with Wing Low, but he is bidding, and Chew See is letting them raise each other's offer. And even a white man would suit the girl better than pot-bellied On Wing Low whose mother and grandmother were the . . ."

BUT the scandals among the female ancestry of On Wing Low did not matter to me. I was thinking of the tangible treachery in the very air of Ah Boon's place last night, and what had happened to a Chinese in my house. The rising warmth of my blood was not alone from Chinese liquor; it appeared I had one end of the tangled skein to work with.

"I'm taking a little stroll," I told Billy Kim.

"Better leave here the back way," he advised, and pulled aside a tapestry covering the wall. He opened a shutter and let in cold wind. I dropped from the opening into a dark alley that lies between the walls of the Golden River Bazaar and a fish-shop owned by Lung Yuen. The wall shutter clicked shut behind me as I headed towards the street and turned into Ah Boon's.

The tables were crowded, but I found an empty place and ordered chow mien and tea. Chinese waiters scurried everywhere, but again I felt the prickling of skin that warned me I was watched. There was no reason for Ah Boon to dislike me, so it meant that George Bullant had persuaded the Chinks to watch me, and I sat eating and wondering why he and Madame Olga feared me.

Madame Olga, robbed last night, no mention in the papers of the loot taken from her house, appeared to me as if she concealed what was lost. That might be the Jade Bells which had disappeared utterly. I wondered if Billy Kim had thought of it and decided to give him a call.

I had sipped enough bottled courage to be reckless. Leaving the chow steaming on the plate, I started for the telephone booth. I was between two tables when a waiter stuck out his foot as he leaned over one table. I tripped, plunged forward, and had sense enough to dive under one table. Instantly, and like a thunder-clap that rumbled after a first crash, came gun-shots.

Into my mind flashed the warning on the church tower: "Fly from evil."

Not flying, but crawling, I scrambled under tables toward the door. The crowd had leaped and screeched and made for the same destination, and you couldn't blame them at that staccato fire of guns. Somebody yelled: "Tong war!"

CHAPTER V.

THE BELLS.

I KNEW it wasn't a tong war; no such luck. In Ah Boon's restaurant several persons were gunning for Jack Duncan. I heard lead slugs thudding the walls and peppering peep-holes in gilt decorations. Through shooting and screeching of frightened customers sounded the shrill whistle of cops on the street. I knew the Chinks would not kill any customers if it could be avoided, so I dived into the crowd, or rather leaped from under a table into people crowding through the door.

Once on the street I made my way into

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crowds that gathered at sound of the uproar. Umbrellas gouged my head and shoulders and tilted my hat over one eye, but on Grant Avenue I felt safer, and also felt I was on the trail of the Jade Bells, though it was faint. Walking along, I turned over the conversation of Billy Kim to get his story straightened alongside facts I knew. George Bullant, who handled dope through Ah Boon, wanted me dead or missing. He was using the drug, Billy said, and crazy about this dancing girl from Pengyang, bidding against On Wing Low, who also wanted her, and risking his life by doing so.

It occurred to me that Strunski's was a capital place to distribute the drug. Samuel was a kindly, trusting old man, and Bullant had been his manager for years.

On that hunch I turned down the tradesman's alley that led to the Strunski Importing House, and standing in the rain, gazed at the barred door and windows of its rear wall. Suddenly I slid into the black shadow of a cornice. Footsteps! The gentle, gliding *slosh* of shoes feeling their way. There came a scraping sound and faint click. I held my breath. Some one was working at old Samuel Strunski's rear door.

The store held treasure enough to reward a burglar, in jade, money in the safe, priceless objects of art; but the burglar alarms were the best yet invented. It was time for me to go, before the alarm flashed at headquarters, and a squad came dashing to the scene. But I heard the door slipping open and a very tiny point of light poked through darkness to a telephone box fastened to the inside wall about eight feet from the door. I heard the receiver lifted and a man's voice giving the headquarters number. I had memorized it when I worked for Strunski. Hearing it I almost ran down the alley.

"This is Bullant, manager of Strunski's Importing House," I heard George himself say. "I expect our burglar alarm rang. The fact is, I forgot my front door key and used the rear door to get in. Sorry to set off the alarm . . . Oh, they're on their way already. Fast work. I'll wait till they arrive and explain what happened." The receiver clicked.

The tiny flash light moved to a switch-box on the wall. Then George Bullant followed its small gleam into the ware-room and through to the glass walled office. He pulled down blinds that covered the glass and was closed in with the light from a shaded desk lamp. I strolled to the alley entrance and saw the emergency squad arrive in a fast car. Three officers tried the front door then circled to the rear and entered. I was on the Grant Avenue corner when they emerged from the front door smoking cigars and George was with them. He passed, but did not see me, a big, prosperous looking Bullant swaggering in his camel-hair overcoat and good looking, broad-brimmed hat. But there were fat bags under his eyes and cheeks, and he stared ahead with eyes that showed dark and enlarged irises, not a healthy sign.

I RETURNED to the alley because I knew George Bullant had disconnected the burglar alarms. In fact, at his request, I had figured a way of disconnecting them merely by brushing a hand over the wires after old Samuel set them for the night, because George Bullant often held little parties in the office during the days when I was head clerk under the management of George. That fact was not mentioned at the trial, though I longed to tell it when I suspected Bullant was framing me. It would have counted against me and done nothing but destroy any faith left in old Samuel regarding me.

In the dark alley I waited with my body flattened against the wall and a trickle of dripping water sliding down inside my collar. I figured George would be back. Sure enough, within twenty minutes after the police car roared away, George came out of the rear door and walked past me to peer from the alley down the street. It was the chance I wanted; I grabbed it.

Stepping from under the stream that filled my underwear, I cat-footed to the door, glancing at the alley end. George

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was standing in the gloom, though street lights made him visible to me. He was waiting for a friend, I judged.

A lot of queer ideas flashed into my mind and trickled into the discard. I wanted to see the show-rooms and old Samuel's desk with the basket on it from which he once peddled plaster saints on the streets and gathered the foundation of his fortune. In that office I taught him to write his own name in English, imitating the writing because he didn't know even his alphabet, though I was the only person who knew it, and this is the first time I've told.

I recalled endless kindnesses to me, and wished he had not needed to think that the boy he had befriended had stolen his most cherished possession. Samuel had run into bad luck, yet he deserved the best. George Bullant was using his store to cater to the most despicable trade on the coast. I had helped George work out the burglar alarm stunt and I was ashamed of it. Perhaps Billy Kim's hooch made me feel softhearted, but I was in the mood to undo my one deliberate dirty trick about the burglar alarm, especially now since by doing so Bullant might be trapped.

Bullant was still waiting down the alley as I slid along the wall to the other end and headed for the Golden River Bazaar from where I intended to telephone Samuel Strunski. The Chinese stores keep open late on festival days. A few tourists were looking at porcelain gods and carved ivories in the Golden River, so I slipped up the alley hoping to enter by the wooden shutter Billy had opened to let me out. It was locked, so I started towards the street.

WITHIN twenty feet of emerging I saw a big limousine gleaming with plate glass, black lacquer and chromium, slide along the curb. It was full of fat mandarins, a gathering of the lords of Chinatown at the Golden River Bazaar.

Kim Wo, Billy's father, is one of the influential Chinese. Perhaps the shooting at Ah Boon's place made this meeting necessary. Every gun fired in Chinatown is blamed on tong wars. Any coolie taking private and personal vengeance on a fellowman is likely to get the tongs in wrong.

When a uniformed chauffeur opened the limousine door, seven fat mandarins waddled out, five of them wearing ceremonial robes and among them was old Asia Low!

It was four years and more since I'd seen him, but he had not changed. A face like a yellow mask was shortened by a skull cap cutting across his forehead. Winged eyebrows and dark thin lips marked the face in straight slashes. Rumor says he was once a trader among South Sea islands, and that he owns the island named after him where he built a temple for a golden Buddha around whose neck he wanted to hang the Jade Bells. It was a religious urge with him to possess them.

It seemed to me the gods of China signalled a message to me that I was too dumb to understand, but there wasn't a chance of getting speech with him that night.

The mandarins entered the Golden River Bazaar where Kim Wo waited at the rear, wearing his robe and shaking his own hands in greeting as they did also. Then they disappeared rearward. Somewhere in the upper rooms they would have a meeting. But if I could get word to Asia Low that I was looking for the Bells I would be protected from Ah Boon's henchmen until I failed to find them and admitted it.

Back down the alley I went, feeling both walls to find an opening, door or window. It was blacker than bats, and I almost gave up the idea, only I knew fast action was all that would save Jean and me from the cops looking for us. I had to get back to her soon, and there was Strunski's rear door that needed watching. With groping hands I examined the walls as high as I could reach, and at the end of the alley found a black door.

That door might lead to sudden hell. Chinatown is no safer than any other American city where loot is to be found. Warrens wriggle through it just as they did in the beginning. There is only so much ground space, and it is necessary to build

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high and dig deep to accommodate its increasing population.

I felt around in the mud and slop underfoot until my hand grasped a broken brick. Then I heaved against the door and found it as rickety as most Chinese contraptions of wood. After the fourth attempt it gave way, making enough noise to rouse Chinatown. I waited for reprisals, but none came. My foot found steps. Flattening my body against the wall in case an upper door should open, I mounted the stairs. The old steps creaked, but no one heard or investigated. At the top was another door and a window in the wall facing California Street. Light blurred its dirty panes of glass.

I tried to lift the sash, which stuck but finally yielded. Leaning out, I saw a wall two feet away with a roof ledge on which I stepped. Reaching across the narrow aperture I managed to walk that narrow ledge to a farther roof and almost lost my bearings. A couple of minutes reconnoitering on the roof brought me to a skylight, which in Chinatown is a sign of a more exclusive store beneath it. It was locked and dark. Hauling the brick from my pocket, I tapped the glass and heard the *clink* as it broke but did not fall. The skylight was covered inside by cloth or paper.

REACHING one hand between jagged splinters of glass, I felt cloth. After removing pieces of glass I unfastened the frame and lifted it. Everything was dark, and at the risk of breaking my neck I hung on the skylight and dropped, not very far. I felt around with my hands; chairs in padded burlap, chests, bales, bundles revealed a storeroom, and I knew it was the Golden River Bazaar.

I crawled over bales in tea matting and felt the walls till I found a door that wasn't locked, though I felt a lot less comfortable than ever in my life. In a second storeroom were more padded, wrapped bundles and furnishings over which I climbed to feel the walls until my arms went through a doorless opening where noises began, the gabble-gabble of women and children in high-pitched Chinesey sounds, Wo Kim's living quarters, his Flowery House. That wouldn't do. I slid over the bales to a space in the center and, taking off my shoes, tied them around my neck. Feeling with my toes, I found an iron ring in the floor, a trap-door.

Believe me, I lifted it cautiously, but there was no light below. A cracked Chinese voice cackled Cantonese. Sneaking down, I stood in a sort of dark entry lighted by a grimed electric bulb dropped from the ceiling on a cord. I had one look at somebody coming up the stair and nearly squawked. By the two holes in her noseless face it could only be Chew See. Her black hair was sleeked from her forehead to a bun on her neck stuck full of jeweled pins that glittered. Behind her came a young and slender figure wrapped head and all in black, but the cloak or shawl or whatever it was fell from her face a little and I caught a glimpse of her.

I don't mind admitting my heart leaped at the sight. I had never seen her before, neither had any other white man this side of the Pacific, unless it might be Bullant; darn few Chinese ever saw her. Her skin was creamy gold, warmed by color like ivory seen through sunset pink. Her black hair fluffed out in sheer sprightly vitality from its severe fashion like black storm clouds touched up with burnished copper gleams. She was half-caste, all right. She was beautiful. And she was scared to death of old Chew See, for which I didn't blame her.

That old horror, infamous in Chinatown, clutched one of the girl's wrists. She spoke to somebody behind a door which they faced. A wicket opened because I saw the gleam of a brighter light bring out the pock-marks in Chew See's cheeks. She yapped some message to the gate-keeper and turned to snap a few words at the girl.

A slender hand in the silver embroidered sleeve of a kingfisher green coat came from the girl's black shawl drape. She took something from inside her coat and dropped it in the reaching yellow claw of

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Chew See. The old hag fumbled to thrust whatever it was inside her own coat. And I saw *it!*

I had one flash of green sight, but it was enough. I had one tinkle of elfin sound as the tiny golden clappers struck the perfect bells.

This was the dancing girl from Peng-yang. She was being presented to a gathering of influential mandarins.

And on Chew See's wrinkled bosom were the Jade Bells!

CHAPTER VI.

A FRIENDLY HAND.

AT sight of the Jade Bells, the apparatus with which I do my plain and fancy thinking curled up and quit.

I hardly had a sight of them, the heavy golden links and pure green beauties hanging between. But I had seen old Samuel gloating over their perfection as they lay in his gnarled palm; I had seen Asia Low staring at them as they lay over his tapering yellow fingers, with holy fervor in his eyes. I knew them again.

It did not matter to me how they fell into the hands of Chew See nor why the dancing girl had been wearing them. The proof of my innocence, a decent name for Jean and me lay down in that hall protected only by an old woman, vicious but fairly aged and feeble.

The door-keeper had refused to admit Chew See, and she demanded the Jade Bells from the dancing girl before she was led to gladden the eyes of mandarins.

The door opened and the girl went in alone. Chew See's hand, resting for a moment, began shoving the Bells inside something covering her breast. She walked towards where I was crouching, out of sight of any one coming up the lower stair, and she was so intent on hiding them securely she did not see or hear anything.

Never have I hated worse to touch anything than that old fiend who made money from her possession of Oriental slave girls. I'm no saint, but that was enough without the repulsive holes where her nose had been bitten off by a girl gone insane from ill-treatment, so Billy Kim once told me.

When she reached the end of the passageway, only a few steps, my hand was curved like a claw. It darted to her neck and squeezed. There wasn't much breath in the old crone after climbing the stairs and being excited over the Bells, but I squeezed half of it from her wind-pipe. Then I groped for the Bells. Her skin was flabby and cold like a snake's scales. But I darted up the steps with the Jade Bells buttoned in an inside pocket, and left her like a chunk of thicker shadow groping at the foot of the steps. I lowered the trap-door and hauled bales on it, piled more of them on top to climb on and reach the upper store-room and repeat the hauling and climbing until I was through the skylight opening and running across the roofs to reach the wall ledge and open window on the last stairway. Not caring to risk that last descent, I hung by my hands and dropped from the window, went through the alley and reached the street.

THE big limousine was gone. Kim Wo was probably having an all night party. By the church tower clock it was twelve-eighteen. You can cover a lot of ground in two hours when dodging death in only three or four city blocks of down town San Francisco.

The Jade Bells were the biggest responsibility I had ever carried. If I was taken with them in my pocket I'd go up for twenty years as a second time loser without the murder in my shack and Jean's suspected stabbing of the taxi driver counted or reckoned with. George Bullant would laugh if that happened. George Bullant! I wondered if he were still waiting in the rain, and how he would have liked to be caught with the Jade Bells in his pocket.

There was an idea for retribution. He had worked cleverly to have me sent over. I wasted three or four minutes standing in the dark alley considering vengeance. And when I was ready to saunter into the street, Billy Kim was standing in the Bazaar look-

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ing at a magazine lying open on a glass showcase.

Billy has a sneaking fondness for movie magazines. I wished I had another shot of courage from the blue stone jar with its proverb about the rat in the bin and woman on the street; pretty wise people, these Chinese, regarding their philosophies that take the place of our ancient heaven and hell.

George Bullant was a rat in Strunski's bin. Chew See was on the street. I wondered if she had regained enough breath by this time to raise an alarm in the upper passageway. If so the alley was perilous ground for me and the Jade Bells. I began to wonder if Billy would take care of them for me. There had been a reward offered for their recovery by a big insurance company when first they disappeared. Probably it still stood. Billy might restore them and collect. He spent money freely on roof gardens, expensive tailors and speed fines while driving.

Ducking into the alley, I hammered on the wooden shutter. He heard it, and a minute later was opening it and giving me a hand to crawl inside the Golden River Bazaar office.

"How's chances for a little more 'rat in the bin'?" I asked. Billy closed the shutter and went into the store where he locked the front door and switched off the lights. Returning, he offered me cigarettes and filled the little liquor cups.

"I'd like to telephone," I said, taking up the desk phone as he nodded assent. I wanted to hear news from Jean. Mother Villiston answered the call so quickly that I knew she was camping near her telephone.

"How's Jean?" I asked.

"Nobody by that name is here," she snapped. "I'm tired of saying so. I ain't got a hired girl at all. The one I did give a day's work to didn't like my place and she left. I don't know where she went."

Her information, deliberately worded, jolted me.

"This is Jack. Can't you speak out?" I pleaded.

"I can't help that, she ain't here," came back to me, followed by a bang of the receiver. I almost slumped. The cops had crowded Mother Villiston so close she had got rid of Jean and she was afraid of spies in her own house by the way she spoke. She dared not risk information to me over the wire. All the spunk oozed out of me. I grabbed the cup of "courage."

"Billy," I said, "I know where we can get the Jade Bells. More than that, if you'll do me one favor I'll get them and hand them to you to do with as you please. My girl has disappeared. I don't dare ask questions, and I've got to find her. Help me find her and I'll lead you to the Bells. I don't give a damn about them any more."

FROM that hour Billy Kim, already prejudiced favorably towards me, was my friend; in fact, he wouldn't let me out of his sight. He said we would start out in his car and we went through the alley window, which clicked behind us, automatically locked. He unlocked a door in the farther wall which led into another alley boring through the block to a street where his car was parked in a public garage. The car, a slinky but powerful roadster, glided out with us and speeded down the street, turning corners that led us by the back way to Mother Villiston's house.

The rear door was unlocked, but she had heard the car and opened it as I came quietly up the steps. It was pitch black and I saw only the bulk of her figure.

"It's Jack," I whispered. "Where is she?"

"My God, I don't know. I had one of my boys, Sidney Johnny, keeping watch, and he said the cops were headed this way. She got scared and went to look for you. I couldn't stop her."

"But where would she go looking for me?"

"I don't know. Try your own house. She mentioned that, and said she was the only one that knew where you lived."

It was enough to send me back to the car, which purred away as I leaped for it.

"Alameda next," I said to Billy.

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"But that means crossing on the ferry," he objected. "I know a quicker way than waiting. Anyway, it's after twelve. The Alameda boat has stopped running for tonight." He was speeding toward Hunter's Point, which lies across the narrow southern end of San Francisco Bay almost opposite Alameda.

By day along here the fishboats painted blue sway on the Bay waters, coils of brown fish-net lend atmosphere and old men sit mending them with wooden needles and twine. There are stands that sell shrimp and crab cocktails, fish soup, oysters and Dago Red; coffee, too.

Billy Kim dickered with one of the fishermen to take me across the Bay in his boat and he paid the ten dollars requested. I hadn't the money. It took time because the tide was turning and the fisherman was all set to go out to the nets. Billy said he'd wait on the wharf with his car.

The fishboats are fast and have powerful engines, yet that one seemed slow to me on that night as she chugged across the black water towards the Alameda beach. The water wasn't deep enough for her to get nearer than two hundred feet from shore, so I took off my shoes and socks, rolled up my pants and waded in the direction of my own shack. Coming near it I saw the curtain blowing in and out of the window and I remembered closing the window before I left that morning. I wasn't likely to forget a single movement of my own that day.

THEN, without apparent reason, the curtain ceased wagging to and fro. Something or some one was holding it steady, having heard me splashing towards the bulkhead ladder. It might be a cop, but if so he'd have a gun aimed at me and I was caught anyway. I risked it.

"Honey," I called softly.

The curtains parted. Her little white face was between them and she didn't wait for me to give further directions. Jean was out of the window running to the ladder, and I took her on my shoulder and waded out. I had my girl again!

Where to take her, what to do with her, I didn't know, and I was carrying the Jade Bells, a load that would make the Old Man of the Sea a mere featherweight. The boat chugged across the Bay while I hugged her close and tried to think and plan ahead. She was too tired to ask questions, and I didn't offer information, because Tony at the engine could hear, and he must have wondered what was doing anyway.

But Billy was waiting for us and I introduced Jean.

"Billy," I said, "where can this little lady stay while you and I ring those well known Bells?"

Jean was clinging to my arm, all in, and I was pretty near the same.

"I wonder if Tony could take her to his house?" Billy suggested. We decided to ask Tony, but he declined. He said stealing a girl from a window didn't look so good to him. Anyway it was too late for him to wake his family by bringing home a young lady and not being able to say why he had a visitor. Besides, he was going out to lift his nets. The herrings were running fine. He would have been there by now if he hadn't take that trip to Alameda.

"Take me fishing with you," cried Jean. "I'd like that. I'd feel so safe on the water . . ."

"No-no-no-no," began Tony, but Billy Kim held out a twenty-dollar bill. The triple-tongued negatives ceased immediately.

I lifted Jean into the boat and kissed her.

"I'll be waiting here when the boat comes in, honey," I promised recklessly. "We'll find a preacher right away. By that time all this fuss will be over. Billy Kim is helping me straighten it all out."

"But the Bells," she whispered.

"I'll have them too. Honest, Jean."

And she trusted me enough to laugh softly. I hated to let her go but she vanished into Tony's cabin and I wished I was going with her. The distant clock bell struck two before Tony shoved out and

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started his engine and Billy and I went to his car.

"I HAD time to think while I waited for you," he began. "When a man wants to conceal something very valuable he might give it to his woman if he cares for her. That would happen among my people. The Jade Bells were stolen and never found. When you came from San Quentin you were watched immediately to see if you had hidden them and would resurrect them again. That happened in Ah Boon's. You were seen with your girl and she was followed. The driver of the taxi she was riding in was stabbed by some one from Ah Boon's restaurant; perhaps two men were following her in a car after they heard you give the taxi driver her address and they reached the taxi when it stopped for the street car to pass.

"Now I think both those men went to your Alameda house where one of them, a Chinese, was stabbed by the same man who stabbed the taxi driver, William Moore."

I agreed entirely. Billy Kim's college education gives him the advantage of mental training and concentration that I lack. But from that point in his argument he was wrong, because I got the Bells from Chew See, and he figured that Bullant had given them to Madame Olga.

"I think," he went on, "that Bullant was waiting until you were out of prison to plant the Bells on you and have them found on your person, which would look as if you had stolen them first, hid them securely, and dug them out when you were free to dispose of them. Now who is this man who stabbed William Moore and the Chinese in your house, who evidently followed your girl from Ah Boon's?"

"I wish to God I knew," was my helpful reply. "It's still as clear as mud. His picture was snapped by the news reporters, which I had forgotten among other things until this moment. Billy, get that picture. It must be in the papers, but the taxi stabbing got the front page, and I didn't look at any other page all day!"

That slip of memory had complicated everything, but I did have a busy day and considerable worry. Billy pulled up at the first news-stand and asked for yesterday's papers. Our luck had turned. They were sold out except one the kid had used to cover his fresh stock from the rain. We opened the water-soaked sheet and found the item by the dashboard light of his car.

There it was, somebody else's picture, but my name attached to it, "Jack Duncan, who tried to rescue a woman supposedly jumping in the Bay to commit suicide, off Pier Forty-seven."

I knew that face. I had seen it yesterday afternoon in the driveway of Madame Olga's garage. The owner of it had been washing her car.

Billy Kim knew him also. The man had driven Madame Olga in her car to the Golden River Bazaar, not once, but many times. Neither of us had figured Olga in on the hectic recent events. I merely hated her on general principles for helping to frame me, because there was no doubt her evidence at my trial clinched the case against me. But why in thunder had she started her chauffeur on my trail and Jean's?

Olga had been robbed last night. Surely she didn't think I was the burglar on that occasion also. She knew I had not taken the Jade Bells in the first place. She and Bullant were preparing the case against me six months before it happened.

If this chauffeur of hers was the man who stabbed the taxi driver, he was in San Francisco at midnight, miles away from Olga's house in Piedmont, an hour's time by ferry even with a car. But since I had the Bells now, who stole them from Olga, if she had possessed them?

I gave up the puzzle.

CHAPTER VII.

TRAIL'S END.

MADAME OLGA'S chauffeur was the key to the whole business. We need only locate him, which was out of the question at this hour of the

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morning. And I wanted to know how George Bullant was getting along, and if he still waited at Strunski's Importing House. I had explained it to Billy Kim, and now I reminded him about Bullant.

Billy was full of bright ideas that made me respect his intellect.

"Suppose I telephone Strunski's and speak Cantonese. I can pass for Ah Boon. I know that coolie's lingo." And Billy Kim spat to the wind his opinion of the low-born Ah Boon.

We stopped the car before a quiet hotel and Billy went inside. He came out with the corners of his mouth nicked in a smile and leaped into the car.

"The Strunski telephone line is busy, which means the store is not deserted. Bullant is there," he said.

By the clock in his car it was nearly three. Old Samuel Strunski would have a seizure if he knew what was happening in his store at that hour of a wet morning.

The car shot over wet pavements and through misty rain which blurred the street lights. Chinatown had mostly gone to bed. The festival was over. Billy Kim pulled up in front of the Mandarin Café some distance from the Golden River Bazaar.

"We'll leave the car here," he said, which was good policy. I'd rather walk any day when possible than risk his driving. "Let's stroll over and see who was using the Strunski telephone."

We walked as quietly as possible without appearing too suspicious, down California to the Stockton Street tunnel and through it to the alley behind Strunski's. It was as black as ever in the alley. Billy walked through to the other end, but I halted at Strunski's rear door and tried it carefully. It was open about two inches, a heavy door through which truckloads of goods were brought, rolling on overhead wheels. In my time the door creaked as it rolled. But when I flattened both hands and shoved, it moved silently. The wheels had been well oiled. Shoving it another ten inches I was through. Billy Kim would guess I was inside, but it no longer mattered.

Voices sounded in the office behind the lowered shades, low, cautious voices, but tones that let me know two men were having a showdown and losing their tempers over it. I recognized the voice of George Bullant as one.

"You stand there and tell me that you're not in with that crook?" he demanded.

"You know damned well I ain't," said the other. "What's more, if ever I meet up with this bird you call a crook I'm willing to mention who had the Bells while he was keepin' step over the Bay."

Keeping step over the Bay! San Quentin! Myself! And they say eavesdroppers never heard anything that does them any good!

"What about being with this girl on the wharf and getting your picture in the paper as Jack Duncan?"

"That's easy explained. The minute the Bells were missing last night, Olga sent me scouting for you at Ah Boon's. I saw Duncan and his girl there. When he put her in the taxi I figured she had the Bells for safe-keeping. Shop-girls and convicts don't pay for taxis without some good reason."

"So you followed and stabbed the taxi driver . . ."

There it was, just as Billy Kim had figured! If only I could make this chauffeur talk to the police. But he wouldn't admit anything for fear he'd swing for murder.

I MISSED a little of their talk, but it flared up louder again:

". . . Ah Boon figured the same way I did. His man got to Duncan's shack in Almeda ahead of me and hunted, but he didn't find the Bells. I tell you that girl must have them right now. Find her and you find them. Duncan probably gave them to her the same as you gave them to Olga long ago—"

"Shut your face!" yelped Bullant.

"Not till you hand over what you promised. It ain't my fault I didn't find the Bells. You know they couldn't be found. Ah Boon knows it, too. And if I don't get the money you promised, Asia Low

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and Strunski are goin' to know. I've kept quiet so far. I even went on that bum steer after Duncan and his girl because I believed what you said about Duncan diggin' up the Bells the minute he got out of prison.

"I'll tell you somethin' more. Ah Boon knows you slipped them to Chew See to get that Pengyang dancing girl. And if Olga hears about that she'll know where the Bells went last night on that little necking party you staged in her room before the big party downstairs got started. She was pretty drunk, but I'll remind her of a few things. You haven't been any too lovin' to her lately, since you got that dancin' girl on the brain. She'll believe me when I tell her you traded the Bells for the cast-off women of Chinks that old Chew See peddles to the highest bidder. She'll know . . ."

I was wondering how George Bullant managed to hold his temper. His voice was dangerously cool for safety to anybody. I knew all I needed about the mystery of the Bells, even to Bullant trading them to Chew See for the girl, and that old crone going to the gathering of mandarins to ask protection from the gunmen of On Wing Low who was liable to kill her for double crossing him.

It was quite a mess. And it was late in the morning, after three o'clock. George Bullant seemed to be sparring for time by keeping on talking and letting Olga's chauffeur insult him. I grew uneasy. There had been a telephone call on this line. The back door was open. I knew Bullant well enough to realize his ability to plot and watch and wait for results.

It wasn't safe for me in that store, and I went silently to the rear door. Billy Kim was there.

"Let's get out," he said. "Some one is coming."

I didn't inquire who it was or how he knew. I dug into an inner pocket and poked the Bells into his hand.

"If I get out alive I'll see you to-morrow," I said. "If anything happens to me, share what you get with my girl."

Billy Kim could negotiate with Asia Low though I could not. I had to stick around and prove to everybody that I was not a thief.

No sooner was I inside the rear door again when I heard sounds from beyond the show-room. In the office there was a noisy row, with both men yelling and cursing each other, hurling epithets, with Bullant doing most of the yelling, calling the other man a liar.

I went past the office which was between the ware-room and the show-room, and at the front door I saw a commotion. A key was fitted in the lock and turned.

It took all my nerve to do what I did. The odds were against me. If I was found in the store I was supposed to have robbed, who was going to believe my story?

AS the big door swung open I stepped into the light from the street that was reflected against a long Chinese mirror in a carved frame. A flashlight snapped on and its light wandered to my feet and then to my face, blinding me. But I heard the guttural voice of old Samuel Strunski, and I'd have known it anywhere.

"Hands up!" said another voice. My hands went up, but I talked fast.

"Don't make a noise. Just listen a minute to that talk in the office," I begged.

A cop's gun rested against my ribs while they listened. From the yelling and cursing some sentences came clear:

"Damn you, haven't I seen Olga wear those Bells in bed time after time when she rang for me to bring booze or cigarettes up to her? She was scared to wear them in company, but she was so nutty about them she wore them to bed every night of the four years after you give them to her. What if I tell that to the cops?"

"You'd have to explain about stabbing the taxi driver and letting a girl take the blame," sneered Bullant.

Lord, it was good to hear them spilling one detail after another until old Samuel stepped nearer to me, and with his wrinkled hand gently lifted the cop's gun so it point-

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ed at the ceiling. His hand was shaking as it reached for mine and pulled it down inside his fingers.

"I'll be responsible for him," he said gently. "You go and arrest Bullant and his friend." And the old voice cracked on a high note that carried to the office during a lull.

There came a yelp from that direction and the door burst open.

"You dirty, lousy, double crossing—" came from Olga's chauffeur, cut short by a gun-shot and his screech.

Old Samuel slumped so heavily against me I had to hold him upright on his feet, and couldn't move to follow the cops to the office. It was dark now, but their flashlights showed Olga's chauffeur pitched forward on the floor at the open door. He was moaning as Bullant stepped out of the office, pompous and cocky as ever, saying:

"This is the reason I asked you to come down, Mr. Strunski, and bring police officers. I suspected this man of pilfering here, and I managed to hold him till you came. . . ."

One of them grabbed Bullant, while the others bent over the wounded man, who had strength enough to talk. They took down what he said in a notebook, and when he slowed down they sent for an ambulance.

He died on the way to the hospital, but he had fixed Bullant.

All I could do was lead old Samuel to a seat and hang on to him while I told what I knew about the mess. The dying man had paraded the whole company by his words, Olga with the Bells these four years, Bullant taking them from her and giving them to Chew See for the Pengyang girl, Ah Boon and Bullant using the store to peddle snow, the taxi stabbing and the stabbing at my house.

I saw Billy Kim the next day. Asia Low paid him five thousand dollars, which he split with me. Samuel took me on again as his head clerk, and said it was because he needed some one he could trust, the highest compliment I ever had except Jean's love. He came to our wedding, and so did Billy and Asia Low, a strange wedding party for Jean, who was christened an Episcopalian and married in the Paulist church with Samuel, who is Jewish, and Asia Low, who says his prayers to Buddha, looking on.

At our wedding supper in Chinatown, Asia Low handed the Jade Bells to Samuel Strunski. But my old boss loved them a little with his hands and eyes and gave them back to the mandarin.

"It ain't goin' to be very long I'm here," he said. "And I'd be glad to know they were where they belong. Let us both restore the Bells to the temple and maybe the gods will give us peace for the gift through the remaining days left to us."

THE END

A Freak Star

ONE of astronomy's queerest museum pieces is a star near Sirius, the Dog Star, the brightest in our heavens. Years past the men at the telescopes noticed that Sirius does not move in as orderly a fashion as it should, and they concluded that a near-by star must pull it out of line. In time a ray of light was found to show that such a star was there.

Strangely the "Faint Companion," as they called the newly discovered, gave but a tiny glimmer of light in proportion to the weight it must have. It must, therefore, be small but heavy. It is now accepted as fact that the material of this "Faint Companion" weighs 61,000 times as much as water. One teaspoonful of it would weigh a ton.

J. W. Holden.

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Masquerade

By FRED MacISAAC

He was a daring impostor implicated in a murder he did not commit—and when the law began to exact a penalty—

"Sign that check," she ordered sternly

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

CHARLES HAYDON WINTHROP was returning to Boston, after having served in the Foreign Legion, when he noticed in the paper news of *his own marriage* to Mrs. Sally Greenough having just taken place! Sally some years previous had jilted Winthrop for a richer man—so in his sorrow he joined the Legion.

Winthrop wondered about the identity of the impostor who so closely resembled him and had tricked Sally into marriage. On the train to Boston, Winthrop meets attractive Violet Putnam, who had been unsuccessful in the show business. Later she is hired as maid to Sally.

But Mrs. Greenough was not being fooled! She had made a bargain with Steve Spencer, the impostor, when he had first taken over the Winthrop's apartment. And when the newspapers ran pictures of the wedding, Steve's old crooked cronies noticed the resemblance and immediately sent Pete Fultz to investigate. The gang was anxious to locate Steve, for he had once squealed on "Lefty Edge."

On arriving in Boston, Winthrop set to establishing his identity and to claim his millionaire estate. But Eugene Cummings, manager of the estate, greeted him with "I never saw you before in my life!" And Winthrop realized that Cummings was

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in league with Sally and Steve. Unfortunately François Garun, formerly Winthrop's Legion mate and now valet to Steve, sees him on Boston Common and reports to Steve.

CHAPTER XII.

MURDER.

STEVE SAMPSON let himself into the apartment on Mt. Vernon Street. In his pocket was fifty thousand dollars in big bills, but he was in a black mood.

François Garun was sitting by the window staring down into a street as uninteresting as any street in any city in the world. He leaped excitedly to his feet as the door opened.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "You come quick."

"What do you mean, come quick?" demanded Steve with a baleful glare. "I came because I thought you might be here. I've plenty to say to you, you dirty little Apache. I've a mind to break your scrawny neck, damn you."

He bore down upon the Frenchman, and grasped him by the shoulder savagely. With a quick twist François swung free. In his right hand, which had been empty, suddenly appeared a knife with a polished blade six inches long. Grinning wickedly he presented its point to his fellow conspirator's chest.

"Be tranquil," suggested the little man. "Ah, that is *bien*."

Sampson had pulled away, pale and frightened. Steve was a crook, a cold-hearted, remorseless criminal with plenty of courage, but François Garun was a Paris Apache made more vicious by years of savagery in the Legion. He was adept with either knife or gun, a killer and a wild beast. It was Sampson's first sight of François in any but a meek, respectful attitude. It had been Steve's intention to make a quick end of François, whose plot this was and whom he had promised fifty per cent of the profits, but it was brought home to him now that François was as dangerous as a cobra.

"Do you know what has happened, you lying French rat?" he cried in a blustering tone. "He isn't dead. He isn't in jail. He's here in Boston."

"But yes. For that I telephoned you at the island."

"Whom did you talk with? What did you say?" demanded Sampson anxiously.

"The English servant. I told him to notify you to come immediate to the apartment."

"Look here, François. I'm sorry I jumped you. We've got to stand shoulder to shoulder. I didn't get your message. I learned the news at the bank. How do you know?"

"I have seen him. I know where he is living. *Mon Dieu*, he was at the bank? We are exposed, *hein?*"

Steve shook his head. "Fortunately for us, the banker is a crook. He has lost some of Winthrop's money and he has declared himself in on the balance. I had to do business with him."

François became his amiable self and grinned cheerfully. "We take care of him more late," he said. "He knew the man. He denied him, eh?"

"That's it. Kicked him out. He's on a spot so he has to back us up. Sally has burned her bridges by marrying me so she's to be depended upon. We've got to get rid of him before he gets around and starts people talking. What does he look like?"

"As I said when I met you, like your brother. Though he has been ill, he is like a skeleton. His noise is broke since I left him. I think he had a very bad

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time." François chuckled heartlessly. "How you like being married, eh?" He leered.

"All right. I'm now going to give her a jolt." He reached for the telephone. He called a harbor number.

The Frenchman grasped his arm. "You do not tell her about him?"

"Listen, this dame is tough," declared the bridegroom. "I've had to cut Cummings in for a third. I've got to explain why. And we've got to bump Winthrop off. There may be complications. Besides, she's clever as hell and may think of something."

"It is a mistake. She loved him once—women you cannot trust."

SAMPSON laughed. "She hates him," he declared. "We got drunk last night and she felt she had to convince me that she didn't love me because I happen to look like Winthrop but for myself alone, see. She cheated on him when they were engaged, and she ditched him to marry a rich guy. She only started after me because she was broke and thought maybe she could patch things up with the returned wanderer. I think she was trying to show me that she was plenty hard-boiled and I couldn't put anything over on her. If he shows up at the island she has to be tipped off or she might give herself away."

"I have known many *femmes*," declared François. "This one is bad. She have the good manners, but in Morocco I have seen none I distrusted more."

"Our chances of putting this over weren't worth a tinker's damn without her. You admitted that."

"*Oui*. But, now, I warn you. We give this Winthrop what you call the 'bump' and tell her nothing. *Voilà*. There is nothing to tell."

"You forget Cummings knows."

"He can do nothing when the other man is dead."

"I had to sign an agreement to pay him one third of the estate for extraordinary services. Otherwise he would not give me a penny."

François extended his palm. "My half, now."

Reluctantly Steve drew from his pocket a huge roll of bills. The Frenchman snatched them from his hand, counted them and kept twenty-five thousand dollars.

"A bird in the hand, she is worth three in the trees," he remarked.

"Look here. I need this money. You'll get an even division later."

"Only the good God knows when later will be," said François sententiously.

Steve shrugged. Later he would reckon with the Frenchman. Just now he needed him badly. He sat down and phoned the island while the Frenchman still protested.

"Shut up. If we have to commit murder, she must be an accessory before and after the fact. I don't trust her any more than you do."

When he had hung up he grinned at François. "She'll be with us in an hour or so," he stated. "We've got to get rid of this guy to-night."

François nodded. "It should be facile. A cheap lodging house on the Hancock Street. He will be asleep. Zip! The throat she is cut."

Steve looked thoughtful. "I'm not so sure about that. No doubt we can kill him, but there will be a body. That means the police. François, were you Légionnaires finger-printed?"

FRANÇOIS chuckled. "But yes. And the Bertillon measurements. That is why a deserter from the Army dare not remain in France."

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"He enlisted under his own name. That means his prints are positive identification. Of course it's not likely that the Boston police would make inquiries abroad. There may be somebody who came across the ocean with him who knows he was a French deserter. We can't take the chance. Suppose it was cabled across that the corpse was Charles Haydon Winthrop."

"And you, also, have been fingerprinted, eh?" demaided François shrewdly. "When I met you you were pale from the prison. It is as you say. There must be no body. Eh, *bien*. We will kill him and then we burn up the lodging house."

Brutal as Sampson was beneath his rather cultured exterior, this suggestion caused him to protest. François laughed in his face.

"Well, it's not so easy to completely destroy a building," Steve said craftily. "The body might not be consumed. The police would discover that murder had been committed. If we could only get hold of him."

"Sink him in the sea—silence!"

A key was turning in the door. It opened. There appeared in the entrance a squat figure with a red face and a bald head fringed with reddish hair.

He grinned maliciously at the conspirators, turned his head and called over his shoulder, "Step into your apartment, if you please, Mister Winthrop, sir."

And Charles Haydon Winthrop followed Mike Brandon, the janitor of the building, into the room. He closed the door behind him—his eyes gleaming at the sight of the two men he wanted most of all to meet together.

"What the devil do you mean, Brandon?" snarled Steve Sampson, whose right hand went to his hip and whose face was distorted with a scowl in which apprehension was mingled with fury. "Who is that tramp? Get the hell out of here, both of you."

"And how do you carry yourself, my little bird of evil?" asked Winthrop of François in the French tongue. "Robber of the dead. Assassin of your mother. Are you glad to see your old companion in arms?"

François stood in the attitude of a trapped wolf, his upper lip drawn back, his yellow fangs bared viciously.

"It's the police I'll be calling to give you in charge, you faker, you," rumbled the janitor, his round red rimmed eyes glowering at the false Charles Winthrop. "Sure, I knew Mr. Winthrop the moment he spoke to me, you phony, cheating crook, you. In fact, from the day you come here I suspicioned you. Sure, what Miss Sally could be thinking of to marry the likes of you—"

Something like a streak of light darted across the room. The point of the knife of François Garun plunged into the broad throat of the Irishman. A jet of red blood spouted from the point of contact and then poured from nostrils and mouth. He tottered and fell heavily. And as Winthrop, with a cry of horror, rushed forward he looked into the muzzle of an automatic pistol in the steady right hand of Steve Sampson.

"Not as easy as this, Mr. Winthrop," he said softly. "Back up! François. Grab him!"

The Frenchman rushed like a cat at the comrade he had betrayed, but in his excitement, stepped between Sampson and the man he was impersonating.

With the force of the fury caused by the murder of the honest Irish janitor who was the first friend he had found since he arrived in Boston, Winthrop

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drove his right against the point of the Frenchman's jaw, caught him as he collapsed and, lifting him in his arms, hurled him at Sampson, three feet behind.

Steve sidestepped but the hand holding the automatic dropped involuntarily and the infuriated Winthrop leaped upon him and his momentum sent both men to the floor.

WHILE Steve was twenty pounds heavier, he was soft from his enforced relaxation in prison, and Winthrop, though low in vitality at the moment, had muscles like steel wires as a result of years of hard labor. The gun flew out of Sampson's hand as he went down under the human wild cat and for a moment or two he was unable to defend himself against a shower of savage blows to face and body. They rolled over and over, came into contact with the still form of Janitor Brandon and fought silently and viciously beside it, upon it and over it. And then a smash in the back of the head from the heavy boot of François Garun knocked the senses out of Charles Winthrop, and Sampson, swearing furiously, threw the unconscious man off his chest, and was in time to grasp the right hand of François who had possessed himself of the automatic.

"Not yet," he grated. "We've got to think. You fool, we've one corpse on our hands already."

"He's the devil," protested François. "It is not safe to let him live a minute."

"Use your head. We can't get rid of two dead bodies. Sally will be here in a few minutes. Get something from the kitchen to tie this fellow up. And a gag. Good Lord! The other one is bleeding like a stuck pig."

"*Oui.* Like the *cochon* that he is."

"Damn you, you didn't have to throw that knife. We could have overpowered the pair of them. Oh, this is terrible!"

"Bah!" sneered François. "For a wise man, there is always a way."

He ran out of the room and returned in a minute with a clothes line with which he proceeded to bind Winthrop fast, after which he thrust his own dirty handkerchief into the young man's mouth and held it there by means of a roped towel.

"Give me help," he demanded. "I cannot lift him unaided."

Together they carried Winthrop out of the living room into the bedroom and dropped him on the bed.

"Now stop that corpse from bleeding. We'll shove him under the bed for the time being. What a hell of a mess you got us into."

CHAPTER XIII.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

IN ten minutes, however, the body of the unfortunate Brandon had been hidden from view in the bedroom, the pool of blood on the rug had been sopped up and, after some cogitation, they had rolled up the rug and placed it in a closet. After that both men removed bloodstains from their hands and changed their clothes. It had been impossible to move the murdered man without becoming smeared with the red stuff.

Sampson observed that the eyes of Charles Haydon Winthrop had opened and he could not resist a jeer. He walked over and stood looking down at his captive.

"You ass," he sneered. "A child would have had better sense than to

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walk in here unarmed. I've nothing against you, but you happen to be a nuisance."

He returned to the living room, closing the chamber door, and dropped into a chair. He was frightened badly. Under the circumstances he would have welcomed the entrance of Winthrop unattended, but the disappearance of Brandon, assuming that they were able to make the body disappear, was apt to cause complications.

François came out gleefully.

"I have thought of something," he declared. "In the desert, when one of our Légionnaires falls alive into the hands of the Arabs, the Arab women mutilate him. So when we catch an Arab and the officers do not prevent it, we also mutilate. I have done it myself."

"What the deuce are you talking about?" said Sampson angrily.

"Winthrop." François grinned like an evil ape. "I fix him so he do not look like you. He do not look like anybody. I cut open his lip, I pull all the teeth, I take out an eye."

Sampson stared at him in horror.

"The fingerprints, eh?" the Apache replied to an unasked question. "Zut. I cut off the hands, then throw the body in the street."

"This man was your friend," muttered the American criminal. François grinned fiendishly.

"I 'ave no friends," he declared. "We march together. We sleep together. I save his life in battle. He saves mine. We desert together. When he can help, I am helping, too. When he is a burden I leave him in the desert to die. Now I am to be rich and he interferes." He gazed menacingly at Sampson. "You and me, we are friends because we need each other. Betray me—I do not think you would dare. You have not the audacity of the man in that chamber, my prison fruit."

Steve managed to pull himself together. "None of your damned Arab tricks," he said firmly. "We have to kill Winthrop since you have already murdered the damned janitor. Tonight, somehow, we must manage to get the bodies out of this building, put weights on them and drop them to the bottom of Boston Harbor. Sally's on her way here. I'll meet her down below and take her somewhere. If she knew what had happened, she might weaken."

"Tell her nothing."

"I have to explain why we must give Cummings a cut."

"Say nothing. When these are out of the way, these cadavers in there, we talk to Cummings, we get back the paper you give him like a fool, we still his tongue—"

"Damn it, François, I didn't figure on wholesale murder."

François's wicked eyes danced and his grin was sardonic.

"One dead man, a hundred, the punishment does not differ."

"We're in for it," admitted Steve with a sigh. "François, go in the other room and fetch me my hat and light coat."

"You fear the dead," charged François. "When you have seen hundreds laying in long rows, when you have dug the holes, grabbed the corpses by the legs, tossed them into the holes and covered them up, you make nothing of it."

"I certainly have not had your experience." His tone was bitter. "Listen, my good friend. You have a little money in your pocket. You think perhaps you will walk out of here and vanish, eh? Do not think that. I, François Garun, will find you. I will pun-

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ish you like the Arabs. And there are in New York the gunmen from whom you were hiding when I met you and saw that you resembled my old comrade in arms. If I do not find you, they will. I shall see to it. I also shall vanis, but this corpse, these two corpses, will remain—in the apartment of Charles Haydon Winthrop. For murder, there is no statute of limitations."

"Don't be a fool," said Steve harshly. "I'm in this up to my neck. I'll get rid of my wife and be back in an hour or two. You stick here and see that nobody gets in."

"*Bien.* Go in there and get your own hat and coat."

"I don't need a coat," declared Sampson hastily. He snatched a cap from a chair where he had flung it a few days previously and fled from the apartment of death.

FRANÇOIS went to the window which looked down on Mt. Vernon Street, raised it and looked out. He saw a taxicab coming up the hill. A moment later Sampson appeared in the street below and the taxi swung over to the curb.

He opened the door and entered. The machine continued up the hill. A few minutes' delay and Mrs. Sampson, alias Winthrop, would have intruded.

Closing the window François seated himself, drew a yellow package from his pocket and lighted a cigarette of a type popular in France. After an extended search he had found a tobacco shop in the North End of Boston which imported and sold them. The odor of the burning of the assortment of refuse they contained was dreadful, but it brought peace to the Frenchman's soul.

It was a soul which must have been wicked when it entered his body of a new born babe. His mother had been a drab of the back streets of Paris, his father a cutthroat. At the age of six he had picked pockets, at fourteen had committed his first murder. At eighteen, the war with Germany had broken out and François, realizing that the practical minded French War Department would round up the scum of Paris and put them in uniform regardless of age or service classification, enlisted in the Foreign Legion but with no patriotic purpose. He assumed that the Legion would remain in Africa, comparatively safe. Instead, the Government sent conscripts to Africa and ordered the seasoned veterans of the Legion to France.

So, for four years, François had fought for France against the Germans and fought heroically. Half a dozen times he had been made a corporal and as many times his misdeeds had demoted him. When the war ended, he was in prison for rape. When he had served three years of his sentence, he was shipped to Africa after agreeing to accept military service for life in place of perpetual imprisonment. As a soldier he was magnificent. When Charles Winthrop had been wounded in an attack upon an Arab fort, François had dragged him back to the safety of the French trench while the whole Arab array endeavored to shoot him down.

François had a sense of humor; he was agreeable in many small ways, and, his ambition being to escape, and go to America where he had heard that anybody could get rich in short order, he took advantage of Winthrop's gratitude to stick close to him and learn the English language.

Young Winthrop, who had enlisted in the Legion at the end of a long spree and while still heartsick and frightfully bitter, had quickly learned

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that he had bought a ticket for hell, but there was no getting out. When his first enlistment expired, François, at the suggestion of the lieutenant in command of the platoons induced him to get drunk and while drunk, to rëenlist.

As the boy had to talk to some one, he had made a confidant of Garun, who learned that the American was very wealthy. He had not wanted Winthrop to go home leaving him behind and his plan was to seize the first opportunity for both to desert. With his knowledge of Algiers and Morocco, he had expected to win through and he had Winthrop's promise to share his fortune with him.

THERE had come a time during their horrible journey across the desert when it was evident that Winthrop could not go on. François, motivated by self interest, had aided him to a point where it seemed to be impractical, so, after robbing him of his papers, and the few sous in his possession, he had abandoned his comrade. It had taken him some months to arrive in the Promised Land and he was living in a horrible lodging house in the West Forties near Eleventh Avenue, New York, when Steve Sampson, the squealer, came there to hide from the wrath of the friends of one Lefty Edge whom he had betrayed.

Half a dozen times François had been tempted to discard Steve's papers, but, like a cautious Frenchman, he had refrained. And now he looked upon Steve's countenance and knew what had caused him to preserve them.

Familiar with the desert as he was, he was certain that Winthrop had died in the sands a day or two after he had deserted him. Though he knew some one calling himself Winthrop had cabled from Paris, he had been horrified when he recognized Charles on a bench in the park, but, as soon as he was assured that Winthrop was flesh and blood, he knew what he had to do.

While he hadn't admitted it to Steve, he had had a moment of fright at the janitor's entrance with his old comrade-in-arms and had thrown the knife. Well, he must repair that error. Already he had thought of a way.

Whistling softly a bar of a French army march called "Loraine," he rose and moved toward the door of the chamber. Being as curious as a cat, he was going to remove the gag from Winthrop's mouth to find out how he had escaped death in the desert. After that, the knife.

He paused in the doorway with an evil grin and glanced toward the trussed-up prisoner. He grew pale as death. He crossed himself without being aware of the gesture. He mumbled a horrible French oath. The man who had been lying on the bed wasn't there any more. From beneath the bed came a thin trickle of blood. He dropped on hands and knees and stared foolishly under the bed, but the dead man there had no company.

He rose, looked around the room in bewilderment. Was the devil helping Winthrop? Had the devil picked him from the floor of the desert and transported him to America, and had he now whisked him away on a magic carpet?

There was a window open in the chamber. He rushed to it and looked out. Four stories to the ground and no way of getting down there. He ran into the bathroom and there he found a clue. Lying on the bathroom floor were the ropes cleanly cut, and close by lay a double-edged razor blade.

François swore savagely. He was an untidy person. Only a little while ago he had shaved and in disassembling the

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razor the blade had fallen to the floor. François had intended to pick it up, but had forgotten to do so.

HE saw how the prisoner had escaped. From the bed there was an unobstructed view, through the open door into the bathroom. Winthrop, who was a man who had been in many tight places and escaped from them, had spied the blade which had given him an idea. Though bound hand and foot, he had managed to drop off the bed, had rolled across the floor and shoved himself into the bathroom. Having put his fingers on the blade he had twisted his hands until he brought the keen edges against the clothes line. After that it was easy. But where was he? The only exit from the chamber was through the door into the living room, and François had not left the living room. Ergo, he must still be in the room. Most methodically François searched the room and finally gave up in despair.

However, it was a time for action. Winthrop would go to the police. If he had gone to the police and claimed to be Charles Winthrop he wouldn't have gotten far against the statements of Steve, Sally and Cummings, the banker, as well as those persons of his former acquaintance who had attended the wedding and accepted the impostor without suspicion, but if he told of a murder and led the officers to the apartment and showed them the body of the janitor, that would put a different face on things. So, the body must not be here.

What happened during the next half hour is something which must be told sketchily. François dragged the heavy body of the janitor into the bathroom. In the kitchen he found a carving knife and a butcher's saw. He dismembered the body. From the storeroom he drew forth a large trunk. In a closet he found a yellow rubber raincoat in which he rapped torso and limbs, after which he deposited the burden in the trunk.

After that he cleaned up the red mess in the bathroom very carefully, stripped, washed himself under the shower and then put his garments and the bloodstained towels in the trunk and closed the lid.

He telephoned for an expressman and he dressed himself. As he was living in the place, his wardrobe hung in a closet in the storeroom. After a little thought he removed the bloodstained rug from the bedroom floor, together with the discarded clothing of his confederate, took the living room rug from the closet and put them in a second and smaller trunk.

He was in a fever of apprehension, yet he worked methodically, and when the expressman arrived there was no evidence whatever that a bloody murder, had taken place in Winthrop's apartment.

He motioned to the trunks when the man entered.

"Where are they going?" the expressman demanded.

"I show you. I go with you."

François put on his hat, waited until the expressman and his helper had carried out the trunks, cast a last glance around in case he had overlooked anything suspicious, and departed.

CHAPTER XIV.

WINTHROP KEEPS AN APPOINTMENT.

FIVE minutes later the door of the smaller of the chamber closets opened and Charles Winthrop came forth. In his hand he had a bottle

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of Scotch. He went into the kitchen, found a corkscrew, drew forth the cork and poured himself a stiff drink which he needed horribly. It was excellent Scotch, veritable pre-war, and its effect was to give him the stimulation necessary after his experience.

This apartment, it must be remembered, had been Charles Winthrop's home. He had preferred to live in it to residing at Harvard. He had originally chosen it because the apartment building was close to Sally Colton's house and in his youth he had been infatuated with Sally Colton.

He had left word, when he went abroad, that the rent of the apartment must be paid until his return and this specification had been lived up to by Eugene Cummings, his trustee. Several letters from Africa demanding that Cummings buy his discharge from the French Foreign Legion at any cost had not been so effective for reasons which Charles had not dreamed of at the time.

It was generally assumed that Charles had retained his apartment for sentimental reasons, but that was not strictly true.

In the early nineteen twenties the Prohibition amendment had been a sort of gospel and extraordinary measures were being made to enforce it while fellows who still managed to be in possession of good liquors were in danger of having them stolen. A couple of years before he went abroad, Charles had called in a master carpenter and caused him to construct in a very deep closet in his chamber a secret storage place for liquor. The closet had been six feet deep. It became shallow, only two feet deep. Its rear wall seemed solid and it yielded only to the pressure of a hidden spring.

Finding exit from the chamber impossible because of the presence of two armed men in the living room, Charles, after freeing himself from his bonds exactly as François had surmised that he had done, had retreated into the secret storeroom and remained there patiently until the coast was clear.

Occasionally he opened the panel and listened, but he heard footsteps and sounds of activity. There was very little air in the storeroom, but by opening the panel he secured plenty of oxygen, the more easily because François had not closed the closet door after inspecting it.

He downed the drink, then ran into the bedroom, dropped on his knees and looked under the bed. Mike Brandon was gone. He sprang to his feet and rushed for the telephone in the living room. As he touched the instrument he changed his mind. The bumping and banging meant that they had removed the evidence. He couldn't charge them with murder unless he was able to produce the body. And they might be returning at any minute, in which case he would be in as bad a plight as before, with little chance of a second escape.

CASTING a regretful glance around the apartment which was once his residence and for the keeping of which his estate was still paying, he went out of the place and pressed the button for the automatic elevator. As he was leaving it on the ground floor a woman who had come up the service stairs to the basement called to him.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "Where is Mr. Brandon, please?"

"I—I don't know," he stammered.

"But you must know. I saw you going up in the elevator with him an hour ago, or wasn't it you?"

"I don't know where he is now," he

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replied in confusion and, not waiting for further questions, walked out of the apartment house.

Charles had plenty to occupy his mind. François Garun was in this thing with the impostor, probably responsible for the plot against his old brother-in-arms. When he had barged into the apartment with Brandon, the last person in the world he expected to find there was François Garun. Why should the little Apache be in America?

Charles had been of the opinion that François, after deserting him, had perished himself within a day or two. Only the providential passing of the motorized caravan had saved Winthrop. François had emptied his pockets, carrying off a passport he had continued to treasure though it was long out of date, and a French handbill which appealed to his sense of humor since it offered a reward for his capture, and some newspaper clippings from the Paris New York *Herald* which told of his farewell party prior to enlisting. That they could be of any use to François he had never supposed.

But the papers in François's possession, and the resemblance to Winthrop of the other man, had established the impostor and convinced everybody of his authenticity except Sally and Cummings and dear old Mike Brandon.

If they hadn't lost their heads and murdered Mike, it was quite possible that they could have carried off the imposition. But not now. Oh, no. No now!

For killing Mike he would send the pair of them to the electric chair. It's almost impossible to dispose of a dead body in a civilized community.

It had happened, in the old days, that he had been very chummy with Mike. Mike knew he could always get a drop of the real stuff by making an excuse to call on young Winthrop. Once or twice Charles had helped him out of trouble with his wife, who had been alive then. Not having any personal interest in the impostor, a few minutes' conversation with Mike would have caused the janitor to identify him, provided he were still at the Mt. Vernon Street apartment house.

Well, he had found Mike. The first word he had spoken had convinced the Irishman that he was Charles Winthrop. He enlistened in his service immediately.

SURE, the spalpeen that was impersonating him looked like Charles used to look, but there was something different. His voice, maybe. And he wasn't friendly at all. He had treated Mike as though he had forgotten he was an old friend.

"Of course when Miss Sally fell right into his arms I felt he must be all right," he said. "You can't fool a woman in a case like that. But she married him, Mr. Charles. She must be crazy in the head. It'll be a sorry day for her when she finds out she's married to a crook. Sure, you can go up and look over the apartment. They're spending their honeymoon down on Lambert's Island in the harbor. I'll go up with you and open the door."

"He may have left some belongings that will give me a clue to his identity," Charles had explained. "It's going to be hard to prove who I am unless I can prove who he really is."

So they had opened the door, thinking to find the apartment untenanted, or, at least, to find the French servant alone in it, in which case Mike said he would introduce Charles as the man to look at the gas meter.

And the first things that Charles had looked upon was the face of François

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Garun. Then the thrown knife, the battle and the tragedy. And Mike Brandon, poor devil, had laid down his life for a friend.

He had reached the corner of Charles Street and Mt. Vernon when he became aware of motor car brakes. At the same moment a woman called shrilly:

"Steve!"

He didn't look around.

"Steve!"

The voice was directly behind him. He turned his head. A young woman had leaped out of a taxicab and was coming toward him. A vivid, beautiful blond young woman.

"I beg your pardon," said Charles Winthrop.

She stopped short, so astonished that her expression was ludicrous.

"Why, you ain't Steve!" she exclaimed. "You have a busted beak. I only seen yer back, but from the cab I was sure it was Steve."

Charles bowed and smiled good-naturedly. "It seems to be my bad luck," he remarked.

The girl was dressed in blue and white with a little flat hat cocked over one eye. Her hair was whitish, a platinum shade, artificial coloring of course, which didn't go with her brown eyes. She was pretty as a picture, tall, showy, like one of the girls who modeled in Mr. Ziegfeld's Follies in the good old days. A chorus girl was about her speed, judging by her slipshod speech.

"Would you mind telling me your name, mister?" she asked anxiously.

He smiled whimsically. "I don't mind," he said. "It's Charles Haydon Winthrop."

"I knew it!" she exclaimed. "So he wasn't two-timing me at that."

"Knew what? What does two-timing mean?" he demanded sharply.

"You're this Winthrop guy who was in the Foreign Legion and got married a couple of days ago to your childhood sweetheart," she said in a rush. "It was in the papers."

"I'm the Winthrop guy who was in the Foreign Legion, but I didn't marry anybody—what's the matter?"

The color was fading from her satin peach bloom cheeks. Her pretty mouth drew down at the corners.

"Nothing," she said shortly. "Much obliged, mister."

She turned to go. He grasped her arm. "Suppose you answer some of my questions," he demanded. "Who is this Steve?"

"Leggo my arm. I ain't saying nothing."

"Does he look like me? You mistook me for him?"

"I should say not," she said scornfully. "He's a swell-looking egg and you look like something the cat brought in. If you don't let go of my arm I'll holler for a cop."

Being a gentleman and, also, afraid of the police, he released her. She darted back to the taxicab, leaped in and shouted to the driver:

"Go somewhere, pronto."

Charles gazed mournfully after the cab. If there had been another in the vicinity he would have followed her. He felt he should know where she could be found, that girl.

She had been sure he was this Steve. She had accosted him on Mt. Vernon Street, not far from the Winthrop apartment. That was a coincidence. And, when he told her his name, it seemed to prove to her that this Steve was not two-timing her. An expression the meaning of which was unknown to him. Slang, of course. And when he said he wasn't the Winthrop who had

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married Sally Greenough, she had been as sorry as the statement of his name had made her glad. And she was frightened, too. She seemed to think she had been indiscreet. She had fled the scene.

"Steve!" exclaimed Charles aloud. "By God, that's his first name. And this is some girl with whom he was entangled and who is furious because he married Sally. Well, I'll find her somehow and squeeze the truth out of her."

CHAPTER XV.

THE UNSPEAKABLE FRANÇOIS.

THE truck conveying the two trunks, with François Garun riding on the seat beside the expressman, drew up before the Yacht Club and the trunks were deposited on the landing. When the club watchman demanded an explanation, François took charge.

"I am the valet of Monsieur Charles Haydon Winthrop," he said glibly. "I am told to pack these trunks and take them down to Mr. Winthrop's island. Mr. Winthrop is a member of the club, is he not?"

"Sure," replied the watchman. "But you missed his power boat. It brought Mrs. Winthrop up an hour ago and went back. Want me to telephone down for you?"

"Thank you, *monsieur*. It will be very good of you."

The watchman nodded and entered the clubhouse. François seated himself upon the large trunk, which contained the dismembered body of Mike Brandon, and lighted one of his ill-smelling cigarettes. His close proximity to his victim was not what was causing his monkey face to wrinkle with anxiety. He was wondering how it had been possible for Winthrop to dissolve into thin air.

While he was convinced that Winthrop had not been hiding in the apartment, he was unable to figure out in what manner he had left the place nor what course the young man would take regarding what had happened in the place.

If Winthrop had telephoned for the police they would have burst into the apartment long before François had been through with his arrangements. He had had little hope of not being interrupted in his ghoulish labors, and he could not understand why Charles had not returned with the officers before his departure with the trunks.

Having marched and slept beside the young American for years, he knew him to be a man of courage and ingenuity. In his place François would have returned with the police within a few minutes of his escape. The half dismembered body would have finished the game for François and Steve Sampson. Investigation would quickly reveal Sampson's criminal record and the French police would be pleased to give the Boston officers a line on Monsieur Garun.

Steve's wife and the banker might lie themselves black in the face, but it wouldn't avail against fingerprint identification. Winthrop in a few weeks would be back where he belonged and Steve and François started on their way to the electric chair.

As things had happened, they had a chance. No trace of tragedy remained in the apartment. It was the most natural thing in the world for Winthrop's valet to join him on the island with a couple of trunks full of things from the city apartment.

If the real Charles Winthrop went

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to the police with his tale, they might still investigate, consider suspicious the fact that the French valet had departed with trunks almost immediately after the alleged crime, and, even if the trunks and contents had been disposed of, they could make a lot of trouble for the conspirators. It was a pity they had Steve's finger prints on file at New York police headquarters. And, as François knew, there were a number of persons in New York who would swear to the alleged Charles Winthrop's identity as Stephen Sampson, ex-convict.

HOWEVER, François felt, since the ex-Légionnaire had not called the police immediately, he would not call them at all. The young man was not aware of the great vulnerability of his impersonator. Having no means of identifying himself; seeing in his own shoes a man who resembled him as he had been in Boston a decade back far more than he resembled his former self, he must have been afraid to risk the police. For which he was a fool.

What François had to do was to debarrass himself of the contents of the trunk and, as soon as possible, dispose of his old companion-in-arms.

At the end of half an hour, the speed boat which had taken Violet Putnam to the island and recently had carried Mrs. Sally to town ran up to the landing. François aided the boatman to place the trunks on board and seated himself in the stern. He grinned with keen enjoyment when he thought of Sampson's horror upon learning that Janitor Mike Brandon was the tenant of one of the trunks which had been landed that afternoon upon the island.

Tonight, as soon as it was dark, he and Steve must take the trunks to a deep place in the harbor and dispose of them. All would be well if the police did not reach the island first.

His eyes fell upon a round plug in the bottom of the boat, a few feet away from him. The boatman was standing at the wheel up forward. It ought to be possible to pull out the plug, let the boat fill with water and sink. François was a good swimmer and, if the boatman drowned, it wouldn't bother him.

He reached over the side and thrust a finger in the water. Though it was early summer, the temperature of the ocean was icy. François shuddered. He couldn't endure cold water. Besides, there was much traffic on the harbor and some officious boatman might be alongside and rescue the trunks before the launch went to the bottom. No, he would risk waiting until night.

After the trunks were at the bottom of the harbor he and Sampson would go to town, call at the lodging house on Hancock Street and do something about the menace. François began to think of just what they would do and the notions which occurred to him pleased him. The little Apache liked nothing better than to see a human being in agony.

Presently the boat ran up to the island landing and made fast.

"I'll go get a couple of men to help carry the trunks to the house," proposed the boatman. "That big one is awful heavy."

François shook his head. "They are safe in your boat house, is it not?" he demanded.

"Oh, sure."

"Let us roll them in there until Mr. Winthrop decides what he wishes to do with them."

"Suits me."

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When the trunks were lifted ashore, François was pleased to see that they did not leak. His rubber wrapping was an inspiration. Before the war he remembered a case where a couple of men were carrying a dismembered body in a trunk from Cannes to Mentone. The trunk leaked blood, and though they protested that it contained dead pheasants, the Mentone police had forced up the lid and found what they had found.

WHEN the boatman had locked the door of the shed on the little wharf Garun demanded the key, which was turned over to him without suspicion and then he made his way to the house. It was his first visit. It occurred to him that this island would be a wonderful place for a murder. It might be necessary to get rid of Mr. and Mrs. Winthrop for his own protection before this game had been played to its finish.

He went round to the servants' entrance and pushed his ugly face into the kitchen where a heavily built cook was gossiping eagerly with a very pretty blond lady's maid. The girl saw him and emitted a slight scream. François grinned, doffed his hat and entered.

"I am the valet of Monsieur Winthrop," he stated. "I am told by him to leave the bachelor apartment on Mt. Vernon Street and come to the island. My name it is François Garun."

"Pleased, I'm sure," declared the cook. "Though you did give us a start. I'm Jane Johnson, the cook, and this is Mary Morton, Mrs. Winthrop's new maid."

"*Mesdames,*" exclaimed François with a low bow. "It gives me much pleasure. *Mademoiselle,* you are beautiful."

"You are fresh," retorted Violet angrily. There was something about the man which reminded her of a snake. He made her flesh creep.

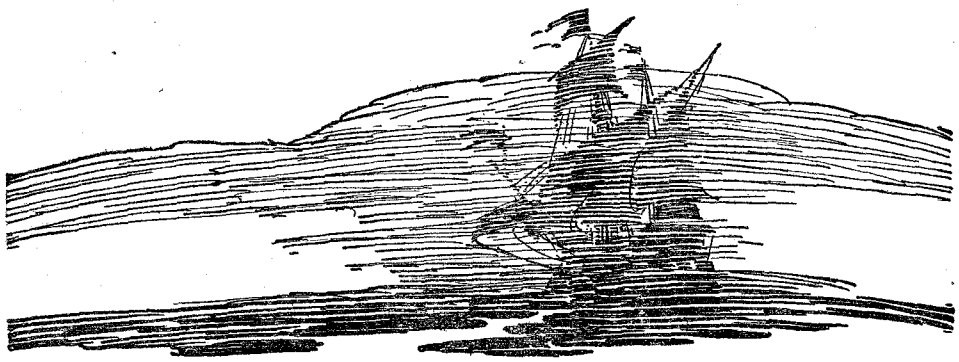
François felt her reaction and resented it. If there were not more important matters on hand, he'd demonstrate to this haughty servant maid how Légionnaires dealt with the female sex. He might find time to attend to her anyway.

"I need a chamber," he said to the cook.

"Mary, go find Mr. Atwood and tell him that Mr. Winthrop has sent his valet down here and wants him to be given quarters."

"Mary" was delighted with the commission, but as she hastened away she sensed that the evil eyes of the monkey-faced Frenchman were focused on the back of her head.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



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MEN of DARING
McKINLEY J. HANNAN WAS BORN NOV. 10TH, 1896, ON A RANCH NEAR BEANS (NOW LANGTRY), TEXAS. HIS FIRST TOY WAS A SIX-GUN. AT AN EARLY AGE HE BECAME A NOTED SHOT AND A BRONCO TWISTER, AND AT 17 AN ALL-AROUND TOP-HAND.
RECRUITS
McKINLEY HANNAN
HANDY WITH A SIX-GUN!
SHORTLY AFTER THE WORLD WAR BEGAN HE WAS PLACED IN CHARGE OF A SHIPLOAD OF HORSES CONSIGNED TO THE BRITISH ARMY. BY LYING CONVINCINGLY TO THE RECRUITING OFFICER, HE WAS ABLE TO ENLIST IN A CAVALRY REGIMENT LEAVING FOR THE FRONT IN NOV., 1914.
IN FRANCE HE WAS ATTACHED TO THE INFANTRY. HE RECEIVED THE DISTINGUISHED CONDUCT MEDAL, WAS LATER GASSED AND WOUNDED AT THE BATTLE OF YPRES AND WAS INVALIDED TO ENGLAND. UPON HIS DISCHARGE FROM THE HOSPITAL HE WAS SENT TO THE MESOPOTAMIAN FRONT AT KUT-EL-AMARA, AND WAS THE LAST MESSENGER TO MAKE HIS WAY THROUGH THE ENEMY FORCES BESIEGING THE CITY. FOR THIS EXPLOIT HE WAS AWARDED A BAR TO HIS D.C.M.

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

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AFTER THE WAR HE RETURNED TO EL PASO, TEXAS, WHERE HE BECAME INVOLVED IN A GUN BATTLE BETWEEN THE KU KLUX KLAN AND THE KNIGHTS OF THE FLAMING CIRCLE. HE FLED ACROSS THE BORDER AND THENCE TO THE ARGENTINE, WHERE HIS PROFICIENCY WITH A GUN WAS SOON NOTED.
IN 1921 A GROUP OF RANCH OWNERS ALONG THE ARGENTINE BORDER HIRED HIM TO RID THE LOCALITY OF CATTLE THIEVES. WITHIN SIX MONTHS ALL DEPREDATIONS HAD CEASED, FOR HANNAN HAD KILLED, CAPTURED OR FRIGHTENED THEM ALL FROM THE COUNTRY. HE FINISHED UP THE JOB BY BRINGING IN SINGLE HANDED ELEVEN NOTORIOUS CHARACTERS WHOM HE LED BY MEANS OF A ROPE AROUND THEIR NECKS.
DURING THE REVOLUTION OF 1922, IN PARAGUAY, HE ORGANIZED AND COMMANDED A REGIMENT OF MOUNTED INFANTRY COMPOSED OF THE HARDEST RIDERS AND THE GREATEST FIGHTERS OF THE BORDER COUNTRY. BY FAST MANEUVERING AND HARD FIGHTING THIS REGIMENT BROKE THE BACKBONE OF THE REVOLUTION.

Next Week: Harold McCracken, Explorer-naturalist

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The eyes of Uncle Eli were bulbs of unsocketed terror

A Grave Must Be Deep!

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Like a Caribbean hurricane, this Haitian murder orgy sweeps to a startling and unexpected climax

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

PATRICIA (PETE) DALE, New York artist's model, was posing one night for her artist sweetheart, " Cart " Cartershall, when they were interrupted by a strange visitor. He was Maître Touselines, little Haitian lawyer, executor of the estate of " Uncle Eli " Proudfoot. Uncle Eli had at one time been Pete's guardian.

Touselines reported that Uncle Eli had been murdered at his Haitian mansion, Morne Noir, and that Pete had been named in the will. Accompanied by Cart, Pete went to Morne Noir for the reading of the will.

It stipulated that Uncle Eli was to be buried with voodoo ritual, and that his estate was to go to Sir Duffin Wilburforce, his overseer, provided Sir Duffin stayed on the grounds for twenty-four hours after the funeral. If he failed, seven other heirs were named in order, the last of them being Pete.

Uncle Eli was duly buried. Then, one by one, the first seven heirs on the list were murdered. Lieutenant Nemo Narcisse, of the Garde d'Haiti, who was investigating the murders, was hampered when the native Cacos started a murderous uprising. They believed they were led by the *zombie*, or spirit, of Uncle Eli.

Cart, buried alive by the natives, was rescued by Pete. Now, back in the châ-

This story began in the Argosy for December 1

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teau, Cart and Pete interrupt a scene where Uncle Eli is driving the natives to a frenzy—at least it seems to be Uncle Eli, although Uncle Eli is supposed to be dead and buried. Cart is telling the story.

CHAPTER XV *(Continued)*.

DEAD OR ALIVE!

THE world, as far as I was concerned, came to a stop. Only shadows in the stopped world swayed, as Pete pointed at Uncle Eli. For a year of sixty seconds, you could have heard a spider's thoughts in that hall; then the lawyer's lower lip broke into piercing squeals; the mob in the front door moaned, shouted, surged backwards; Pete stood in a wind of fear that seemed to pour from those cringing egg-eyes.

I guess my own eyes were doing some bulging; but the eyes of Uncle Eli! The eyes of that cadaver with that red gouge on his chicken-breast were bulbs of unsocketed terror, straining at the girl like frogs trying to escape a leash, wider and wider until it seemed they must break in that face. Something broke in that plaster death mask! The adhesive-taped forehead wouldn't hold. Under the spell of the girl's pointed finger that face appeared to crumple, fall inward, collapse.

A single blue vein ran from temple to temple like a zigzag of lightning. The eyeballs turned upward and stuck. The blue mouth yawned open and gave vent to an exorcised devil in sound.

"Aaaaaaaaa—"

One hand clutched the wattled throat. The knees buckled, the stomach bent. He fell like an "S," corkscrewing slowly on the way down, the black cloak slipping down off his shoulders like an evening wrap. There was a second when I glimpsed a livid smear in the middle of his pallid spine. A little swirl of black cloth, and he was down.

"Let the Cacos return to their homes!" Pete gave the cry. "The King of the Zombies is dead!"

The sound of Tousellines shrieking. The sound of Narcisse, released from his captors, falling as if his ankles were broken and hitting the floor. The sound of the Cacos going home. I've an idea those black Haitian brigands are running yet, for they funneled through the door like racing buffalos, and the night sped them on with whistles and screams. Their departure left a hurricane in the house. Things were falling in upstairs rooms and dishes were dropping with a sound like shot clay pigeons in the pantry.

I rocked out of the office; stood goggling the dead thing in the library door. There was a rumble under my feet.

"Cart! Tousellines!" Pete's cry penetrated the sawdust in my brain cavity. "Wake up, both of you! Narcisse is hurt! We've got to get out of here and carry him! Quick—before they come back—"

"*Ma'mselle! Mon Dieu!*" The old darky could only weep and wring his monkey-hands. I couldn't even wring my hands.

"Don't stand there!" Pete whirled at me.

"Hurry! Cart, I'm going upstairs after the picture—"

Picture! Lord! There she was halfway up the staircase. Her running feet seemed to shudder the balustrade. A rain squall slapped the front door, set it banging on its hinges. A cloud of water entered the hall. In the library where a shutter must have blown open, books were tumbling from shelves, and a paper volume flew around in the morguish gloom like a gull trying to get out. Sheets flagged on the dead in their mute line-up; doors slammed up and down the hall; candles were going out all over the place; it was the debacle at the end of Alice in Wonderland.

Pete was Alice flying down the stairs with her traveling bag and a big scroll of canvas clasped in her arms. Somehow I was picking up the cavalry boots at one end of Lieutenant Narcisse, and Tousellines was tugging manfully to raise the shoulders.

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"Oh, dear," Pete was crying. "Hurry—"

WE staggered through the door, wobbled over the veranda and plunged into a cataract. Over my shoulder I had a last look at the château's hall. Candlelight was licking at the wan, green face of Uncle Eli with its ruptured eyes, adhesive-taped forehead, and the blue mouth set like a trap. Naked to the hips, the black cape billowing and lashing about his legs, he lay on his side, face toward the door, the red smear glowing on his breast—like a picked chicken blown down off its hook.

One last time I looked back. Not until we'd cleared the end of the valley, running through Noah's rain, and left a mile between us and the house. The deluge had blown itself into fulminating wind, and a prong of yellow moon had torn a hole in the sky.

The valley was a flooded blue bowl; the château a silver-striped animal crouching shadowy on the slope below the cemetery bluff. Angel and tree stood high in the moon-pallored dark like two little crests on a beetling crown.

Sighting them there, I thought I saw them move down the sky. Black blocks of thunder tumbled across the windy valley; left a tremor in the air. Pete dropped her suitcase to catch at my arm; and Tousellines lowered his end of Narcisse with a strangled shout. I shouted, too. That angel *was* moving! The tree was chasing after it. Far to the west the *mornes* echoed to a chorus of Lilliputian screams. The valley gave a roar to drown out the wails of the fleeing Cacos; and I watched graveyard and hillcrest come tumbling and bumbling, sliding and booming down the far escarpment like warm chocolate down the side of a cake; a glacier of storm-loosened mud that buried half the valley in its avalanche.

Whoom! Like that. The black hill fell across the bowl. Haiti trembled. Château Morne Noir was gone.

"M'sieu Proudfoot! M'sieu Proudfoot!" That was Narcisse, wakened by the thunder, lifting a lethargic head to look around. "M'sieu Proudfoot— Zombie—"

"Zombie nothing," was Pete's low-throated answer. "This time Uncle Eli is buried to stay."

We moved on up the leafy wet path in a mystery of quieting darkness.

CHAPTER XVI.

PETE'S WORD.

I QUOTE the following from *Moment*—that racy little magazine that gossips its way through the news of the world for the quick digestion of the breakfast reader—and if the cited excerpt missed the scoop of a lifetime for the thinnest skim of the story, it is more due the close-mouthed conservatism of a considerate American consul than lack of reportorial acumen on the part of *Moment's* sharp-shooting staff:

> Haiti—Buried Corpse Leaves Grave—Later Found in Buried House. Perhaps the strangest story of the year comes from the little island Republic of Haiti (French-speaking Negro population) where belief in zombies (corpses brought to life by witchcraft) was stirred to fever pitch during queer seismic antic last week. Some kilometers inland from Cap Haitien, scene of Christophe's Citadel, rise series of forbidding mountains and mornes; a certain district known as Morne Noir overseered by château privately owned by American, Eli Proudfoot, cane planter, one time millionaire, whose recent suicide provoked police investigation and reminded local authorities of unsolved murder of Coast Guard Captain Browninshields killed in Haiti last year (see *Moment*, Sept. 5, 1933).
>
> Death of landowner Proudfoot caused ghost story during brief Caco (bandit) uprising during which local bank blown up, countryside terrorized. Police detachment and army battalion arriving from Port au Prince found revolt extinguished by night of storm after avalasse (tropical rainstorm, landslide) buried Morne Noir château under avalanche. (*Moment*, Apr. 3, '34.) Digging through ruins Haitian soldiers find entire household including local physician crushed, unrecognizable, identified only by clothing, in pulverized house. Landslide tearing old structure to pieces played gruesome tricks on victims. Two found wrapped in bed sheets. Body dis-

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covered in swimming pool. Boy has splintered billiard cue jammed through ribs, ivory ball crushed into mouth.

Grimmest trick of tropical violence was throwing of grave over roof of house. Monument of angel crashes through dining room. Coffin that was buried on hilltop lands in front yard. Strangest of all is body of Proudfoot, twenty-four hours buried, lying in wreckage of main hall, practically unmutilated, clearly identified. Police discover chest of corpse crushed by fallen planking from roof, but autopsy reveals cerebral hemorrhage, and one doctor claims death caused by heart trouble. Secret Service following trail of party said to have attended funeral night before. Police investigating.

But *Moment* never printed the half of it till later, and not quite all of it, then. The quoted item did not appear until the day of our arrival in New York, hours after the last chapter had been told down there in Haiti . . .

I THINK it was called the Hotel Merveilleux. Only a shanty in old shanty town might have been a vision of heaven by comparison (there was a perfume or a goat somewhere that reminded me of that song) but that hotel with its little blue sun-filled patios and a lime tree brilliant with birds, was a marvel as far as I was concerned. There was wash water and soap. Soup and rum. There was a sandy-haired American consular agent with a cynical grin, named Drupievsky, and a meal of something swell called *escargot* which I thoroughly enjoyed until I found it meant snails.

Lieutenant Nemo Narcisse, Inspector Chief of the Garde d'Haiti, was on hand with his former pride and punctilio only a little tarnished; and Maître Pierre Valentin Bonjean Tousellines, LL.B., Comte de Limonade, arrived from somewhere with his cheeks returned to their normal licorice, his Mother Goose umbrella on his arm, and a portmanteau bristling with red tape.

There was a white-haired Haitian general with more medals than a Bowery pawn shop window, and more manners than a lot of Aryans I can think of. And Pete, in a white linen traveling ensemble with a hat at a jaunt and a little red feather.

She shook the hat from her brown-gold head, balanced it on one knee, and soberly tidied up the feather. She could knock me over with it any minute now.

She was saying, "Whether he shot Browninshields, himself, or hired it done, we don't know; but we do know he was directly responsible for the deaths of those others. It was the marksmanship gave me my first inkling—but, good heavens! I just couldn't believe—"

"He must have been a honey," the consular agent chuckled. "Say, how about letting me in on the beginning?" He thrust out long, flanneled legs and wriggled the toes in his open air sandals. His face was pleased with Pete. "Start with Act One. How'd the show open?"

"Exactly," urged the white-headed general. "I would, myself, like to hear it in—what shall we say?—chronological order, if you will forgive my deplorable English." He smiled and fingered a notebook from a tunic pocket under a Croix de Guerre. He jotted with a pencil. "*Alors, ma'mselle? M'sieu?*"

"This is Miss Dale's story," I said. "I'm still lost."

PETE gave me a strained smile. "So was I, Cart, up to the moment you told about seeing that half loaf of raisin bread. But—from the very first that will sounded fishy. I mean all those codicils or stipulations or whatever you call them," she directed at Tousellines. "That part about the heirs remaining in the château twenty-four hours, forced to attend the funeral and all. Just the sort of thing to have the household in conniptions, yet keep them on hand. And the way it was devised—down the list. Calculated to start any sort of a free-for-all. And that eccentric business of the grave-plot marked out, the monument prepared, the exacting instructions to dig the grave just ten feet deep, and that ghastly stake to be driven into the coffin. Every detail had something to do with the murderer's trap for us. I—I might have guessed—"

"Guessed?" I snapped. "Why? Lots

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of old people are fussy about their funerals, their coffins. I can't see how—"

"I thought it was just an old man's morbid streak," Pete lifted her shoulders. "And when Maître Tousellines told us about *zombies* it—well, it seemed logical a lonely old man might do something of the sort."

The general nodded. "The post in the grave, it is old Haitian superstition."

"And the whole plan hinged on that stake in the coffin," Pete breathed. "Right away it was an alibi and an ace in the game. A stake in the grave, a monument planted on top, a body buried ten feet underground and a mile from the house—and yet when we walked back downhill after the funeral and retired to our rooms and Dr. Sevestre stayed outside for a stroll on the lawn, *the murderer was there in the château to meet him!*"

I had a mental picture of that black-shrouded body in the coffin; I could feel again that dent in the casket floor under my left shoulder blade; once more I saw that chicken-breasted thing in the black hall with that stab-red smear under its wishbone. It put dampness on my forehead and I was glad to hear the consul or agent give a whistle of consternation.

"Whew, Miss Dale! I can't figure the answer to this." Tousellines agitated his features into raisin-wrinkles; Narcisse made an audible swallow; the general scratched in his notebook; I waited for Pete.

"He must've been on the front veranda concealed in the vines. Anyway, he hit the doctor with two quick shots."

"Why knock off Sevestre?"

"As Lieutenant Narcisse later suggested, the doctor knew too much," Pete declared. "A great deal was known by Dr. Sevestre. That was why the others in that household were killed, too."

I fuddled, "but, Pete, what did they know?"

SHE reminded me, "You told me the answer to that. Just after the police had left the château. Don't you remember telling me about Browninshields and rum runners, and how you thought Uncle Eli had been murdered because he knew who'd killed the Coast Guard captain? Well, that's the reason those seven others were killed. They were the ones who knew. About Browninshields. And they were murdered because the killer was afraid they might expose him."

"We were spending every effort to run down the Browninshields assassin," the Haitian general advised. "Morne Noir Château had long been under suspicion, and was also under surveillance for smuggling."

"Old Proudfoot had been bootlegging rum to the States," the consular agent suspected. "He used up an awful lot of cane and his boats were always off somewhere. He seemed to have more money than your ordinary planter."

"Of this smuggling business," Tousellines put in mournfully, "I was never aware. I knew my client had agents in New York with whom he was communicating, but I thought always it was sugar."

"The household was on the death list because they knew who killed, or was behind the killing of Browninshields," Pete went on. "The will called them together to their—their deaths. Dr. Sevestre was slain because he knew about the plan. He was double crossed."

"But why were *you* summoned to Morne Noir?" I gaped at Pete. "You weren't any murder witness to be put on the spot."

"I wasn't supposed to be put on the spot," Pete explained with a little shudder. "That was a slip in the plan, for I—I was intended for something else. Another slip was when you, Cart, arrived on the scene. And the killer never expected the police so soon on the job. I think it spoiled his scheme when he knew the Haitian gendarmes and Lieutenant Narcisse were on hand at the doctor's shooting."

NARCISSE'S forehead was doleful. "I? Name of a thousand pipes, but as a police detective I am the most blind. I still do not see."

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"But you forced the hand," Pete rewarded him with a smile. "If you hadn't been there I don't think the Caco uprising would have come so soon. That was the deepest-laid part of the plot. If it had come later—but the killer had to play it fast, and he wasn't ready. He had to do something to get the police out of the château. What time was the doctor shot?"

Narcisse consulted a pad from his tunic. "Two o'clock."

"And Sir Duffin, the Englishman?"

"A moment or so before six."

"Then while the lieutenant was interrogating the household right after the doctor's murder," Pete explained to the general, "the killer was off in the night—he must have had a horse hidden down the compound—riding like mad to start the Cacos attacking Cap Haitien, and start the story that a *zombie* was on the loose. Some time between two and six he returned, entered the château and hid somewhere—probably the office, maybe the tunnel behind the desk. Meantime, with all of us in the library, he had a chance to cut off the telephone.

"And then he heard the Englishman go sneaking up the passage to the wardrobe in the upstairs room."

"That *cochon!*" Narcisse spat. "He was playing the ghost, *mon général,* to frighten those others away, to have the will for himself."

"The killer trailed him upstairs to the wardrobe and shot him in the back," Pete recounted.

The agent said, as if it didn't matter, "I knew that British beggar. He was a louse."

"I think," Pete surmised, "the murderer had expected his companions to do away with Sir Duffin. First on the will, you see. But the police had disarmed the household and that left the whole massacre up to the murderer. *He* wasn't disarmed, by any means. He could open the safe at first chance and take all the guns he wanted."

"*Bon sang de Dieu!* what a terror!" Tousellines shook out.

"Madman's cunning," the girl whispered huskily. "If he hadn't dropped one accidental clue he—he might have carried out his entire plan. But he killed Sir Duffin, and darted back to the office. Perhaps that's when he took that old duelling pistol from the safe. Everybody is up in Uncle Eli's room; the terror has started. Now the killer can sneak into any room he pleases and wait for his next victim. While we're in the dining room, then, he's in the billiard room."

"Waiting for Ambrose," Narcisse gulped.

"He knows, too, that Ti Pedro is locked in the storeroom next door, and he wants to terrify the household. That's why he cut himself a lance from a billiard cue and staged that ghastly scene with the albino. Meantime suspicion would be on everybody but him."

Narcisse mourned, "The will made it seem so, and with those vipers all telling lies, each on the other—what would you have?"

The general raised genial gabled eyebrows. "*Enfin, ma'mselle?*"

HER tired eyes darkened with memory. "After breakfast Ambrose, going to the billiard room, did not see the murderer. Perhaps he was out on the veranda, lurking behind the window shutters. Then the boy was called to the office under the stairs for questioning. When he was returned to the billiard room the lights blew out. The storm played hand and glove with murder all the way. The killer stepped through the shutters; Ambrose saw him, perhaps in a flash of lightning, and screamed. He was dead in a second. And then there was a single shot."

"*Eh bien, mais oui, alors!*" Lieutenant Narcisse clapped a dramatic hand to his bandaged brow. "But this pistol afterwards found on the staircase across that hall?"

"Planted," Pete determined. "Everybody was milling and shouting in the dark of the hall; then crowding the door of the storeroom where Ti Pedro lay dead. Meanwhile the killer, leaving the billiard room

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by a window, could circle the house on the veranda, open the front door unnoticed, and throw the pistol on that staircase without being heard. We were all petrified, looking at Ti Pedro—"

"With a bullet most exactly in the top of his black skull," the police officer blattered. "And the storeroom was locked. The door to the billiard room had not been opened. The bullet down into the head. And who set on fire the grass carpet? Does an assassin in the next room with solid wall and locked door between do that? There was a window, too, that had not been opened. *C'est incroyable!*"

"There's only one way I can explain that," Pete said. She leaned forward on the white bench and searched our variety-show expressions as if for confirmation. The white-haired general frowned amazement and the consul looked amused. She sighed. "This is what happened, I think. In fact, it's the only way it could have happened. Ambrose screamed in the billiard room and was stabbed. Ti Pedro heard that scream, same as we all did. Licked in a dark room next door, he did the thing any person would do under like circumstances. He made a light."

"A light?" Narcisse let his mouth come open.

"Only a little one," was the answer. "You couldn't see it in the hall, even if the transom in that door was open. Can't you picture it? Why, Ti Pedro lit a match and tried to peek into the billiard room to see what in Heaven's name had happened to Ambrose!"

"Peek into the billiard room?" It was my turn to miss.

She made a little gesture of exasperation. "The precise thing anybody would have done. The door between the two rooms. Those old doors all have big keyholes. Of course! Ti Pedro struck a match, stooped to put an eye to the keyhole.

"There must have been a flash of lightning outside, and the poor Dominican saw Ambrose on the floor with that cue in his chest. Horrified, Ti Pedro let the burning match drop from his fingers. Then he reached down to pick it up—"

"By the goat-horned soul of Faustin the First!" the general swore gallantly. "I believe *ma'mselle* is one superior detective."

"And the murderer on the other side of the door saw the match-light at the keyhole," Pete hurried on, "and jumped at the door with the gun, put the muzzle at the keyhole and fired! Ti Pedro's head was down—bending to pick up the match like that—right in line to catch the bullet where—where it did. The blow threw him backwards and the rug was—on fire."

"By George," Drupievsky grinned. "I guess that taught him a lesson."

Narcisse stammered, "But why did you not accuse me of stupidity, *ma'mselle*."

"I wasn't sure," Pete said. "I'm only guessing now. I did try to say something, but we'd discovered Ambrose by that time. The killer had stuffed that pool ball in Ambrose's teeth to make it look as if the albino was third and—anyway I didn't know *who* had done it. That was what had me—had me frightened."

"Good riddance, so far," the consular agent chuckled, taking an apple from his pocket to gnaw an unbashful bite. "Ti Pedro and Ambrose weren't any loss to anybody except the hangman. Who's next?"

"Well, next Lieutenant Narcisse ordered Mr. Cartershall and me upstairs and—then Cart had to paint on a picture—and suddenly word came about the Caco attack at Cap Haitien, and the police had to leave."

TOUSELLINES swallowed a quaver and took up the story. "I was left in charge and it was like hearing my own death sentence. That house of scorpions! When Widow Gladys came out of her room with a pistol, *bleu!*—"

I cried, "That's how she got that pistol! The murderer, out on the veranda, he tossed it into her window."

"And this Jamaican woman, she was killed?" the general grunted.

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I described the gun battle on the staircase, the precipitous death of the Toadstool and his mamma.

It was not too credible, out there in that sun-filled courtyard with birds in a lime tree and the consul crunching a red apple. He finished with a magnificent bite, shied the core at a guinea hen fussing along the blue wall, grinned at me with one fruit-mumped cheek and said, wiping his hands on his pockets, "Fella, you had a nerve playing around with that gang. As for your lady friend, Miss Dale here, I take my hat off. Howdja keep from running out over the horizon?"

"With a bandit uprising? And that afternoon storm and not knowing the country or anything?" I shook my head.

Pete said gravely, "And the rest of them were as scared of us by that time as we were of them. I mean Manfred and the En-sign."

"So the widow and her kid blasted each other off the waiting list," smiled the consul. "How about the next two?"

I described Pete's disappearance, my chase around the house, the En-sign and Manfred stalking each other in the rain, the sailor's timely end. "And Manfred went out of his head; fled down the terrace like a runaway elephant. Blinded by the storm, he ran smack into that swimming pool, stumbled in and drowned."

The consular agent grinned. "If you keep this up I'll think crime doesn't pay and go back home and get a job. Seven of those rats in twenty-four hours!"

"And Mr. Cartershall and I were the only ones left," Pete paled. "I—I was the last name on the will, you see." She made an apprehensive gesture.

It brought a squeak of dismay out of Tousellines. Brows gathered in a troubled frown, the old darky waved his portmanteau at Pete. "*Ma'mselle*, forgive me for not speaking of this at once. The will of your uncle—it appears there are complications. It is not, I find, valid, and—"

I broke him off with an angry, "You mean to say Miss Dale won't get the estate after all this gosh-awful—"

"I don't want anything," Pete protested vehemently.

"But there is no estate," the little black lawyer blabbed regretfully. "I am this morning advised by cable that M'sieu Proudfoot's holdings on the New York Exchange are completely nothing. A matter of unpaid margins. Château Morne Noir has not paid the taxes and faces confiscation, and the plantation was heavily mortgaged only last month and—

"And repeal wiped out the bootlegging business," Pete cried, "and that's what lay behind this whole desperate plot. The rum-runners were under pressure from the police on the Browninshields murder. The gang was broke. Uncle Eli was penniless, facing bankruptcy—"

"*Un moment,*" the general interposed with a Colonial bow. "*Ma'mselle* is not penniless. I do not know if the good American consul, M'sieu Drupievsky, has yet informed you, but there is a posted reward of ten thousand dollars for the dead or alive capture of the gunman responsible for the Browninshields murder."

"Yeah," the consular agent stood up. "And it goes to Miss Dale."

PETE stood up. "Then half of it belongs to Mr. Cartershall."

I stood up. "The dickens it does. I don't even know, yet, how that corpse got out of its grave or who the real—I mean, how it—"

Narcisse stood up. "It looked like M'sieu Proudfoot—"

Pete insisted, "Mr. Cartershall gets half because he—" she looped an arm through my wooden one, "because you spied that half loaf of raisin bread and I'd never of noticed it. I was too rattled to see it, Cart, down in that tunnel room, and if you'd missed it we—we wouldn't be hearing about earthly rewards, anyway."

"Pete," I mumbled, "what in the world!"

"Afterwards, back in the house, alone with Corporal Louis, I began to be sure about it. Raisin bread down in that tunnel. On a kitchen table. Somebody was—

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hungry. Corpses don't—don't eat. How did it get down there. Why? And that fugitive you'd chased *had* to be somewhere."

"But we pounded all over the walls and floor of that room!"

Pete said quietly, "And never thought about the ceiling."

"The ceiling?"

"Yes, and alone in the house with the rest of you gone up the *morne* to exhume Uncle Eli, it—it came to me. Honestly, I wanted to die with fear. I knew right then the killer might be there in the château. The gendarme stood guard outside my closed door; I was just on the point of calling to him when—I heard the murderer speaking out there on the balcony. The corporal fled in terror, and I don't blame him a bit. Then there were two shots—in *Cart's* room—and I heard the gunman go racing downstairs, and then for a long time I didn't hear anything."

Perspiration watered my collar. "He fired two shots in my room?"

"Your door must have been open a little way. He stepped over the threshold, fired twice, then ran. Then I guessed where he'd gone—the raisin bread—everything came clear in every detail—I knew who it was!"

"I saw the paint on his shoe," I whispered. "The tube I dropped up there. He must've stepped on it."

"He meant to kill me," Pete said tightly. "He'd got me down here in Haiti—his first plan was to keep me here. Then he heard Cart and me—talking together—he thought we were engaged—it maddened him, I suppose. So he tried to shoot me. It took me a long time to get up courage to leave my room. Finally I took a candle and started—down to the office—down the tunnel. Nobody was in the cave at its end when I got there, but I—I heard a terrible sound above the ceiling. Shouting and calling. Right over my head. Like a delirium in the air. Cart's voice!"

"The tunnel!" I guess I hollered. "It led from the house out to that grave on the hill!"

"And I could hear you in the grave," she put a hand over her eyes. "I stood on the table and pounded with my fists on the ceiling. I pounded and pounded. Finally I struck something and the wooden ceiling—a big piece of it—swung down like a sort of trap door. There was a foot of space above the opening and—and I was looking up at the bottom of the rosewood coffin!"

"Say!" Mr. Drupievsky's face was wry with incredulity.

"I didn't know how to get through. You see, the sides and ends of the casket were resting on ledges of hard earth. Anyone looking down into the grave from above wouldn't see any hole under the coffin. Looking up at the thing from underneath I could only see a patch of rosewood about the size of a—a big washboard. Just big enough to let a body pass through. Remember, how the casket was especially constructed and kept hidden in the storeroom? Well—it has a trap door, too."

SHE put her hands on my arm. "That's how the runner vanished in the tunnel ahead of you, Cart. In the pitch dark, he jumped up on that table. You ran straight across the room and bumped into me. We rolled and fought on the floor and that beast opened the trap in the ceiling and the trap in the coffin and crawled up into the grave. That's when he dropped that bread on the table."

"Ye gods!" Only I didn't say ye gods.

"I didn't know how to open the door in the coffin's bottom. A hidden spring built in the casket somewhere. I suppose there was a release inside where a man could work that false bottom, too. Anyway, I had to smash off a table leg, and finally with that I pounded the rosewood to pieces. Cart tumbled out and I thought he was smothered. I had a terrible time dragging him back through the tunnel, he kept fainting and groaning—"

I gagged, "But if Uncle Eli was—"

"He was never dead in the first place," Pete said, tight-lipped. "His suicide was a fake. Dr. Sevestre, in on the scheme,

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simply palmed a bullet from his head and pretended an autopsy. The adhesive tape merely hid the fact there wasn't any bullet hole. That's what the doctor knew, and that's why Uncle Eli killed him first. We know why he slaughtered the rest of his gangmen. And he planned to make himself dictator of Haiti."

"He called himself the Emperor," Tousellines blurted.

"As a *zombie*," Pete nodded, "he could play on the superstitions of these people and bring the Cacos under his control. He'd lost his estate, now he wanted the island. Mad, yes. He planned to seize all of Haiti. He would have made me—his slave or something, and, playing the living dead—"

"But the stake in the grave!" I groaned. "And when the grave was dug there wasn't any hole down through because I saw the bottom, earth, puddles—"

"Plenty of room in Uncle Eli's casket," Pete whispered. "He could hug against one side and the stake would miss him entirely. And then it sprung the trap in the bottom of the coffin. Don't you see? The grave-diggers were instructed to go down exactly ten feet. Which left a foot or so of earth between the grave bottom and the roof of that underground room. You remember the floor of that dugout was scattered with dirt. That's where it came from. The stake pounded through the coffin lid, drove open the trap in the floor of the coffin, broke through the floor of the grave and forced open the door in the ceiling underneath. The dirt in the space between poured through and Uncle Eli dropped out of the coffin into the tunnel. Easy enough to paint those horrible smears on his chest and back. And when he heard the police were going to exhume his body it gave him a chance to play *zombie* better than ever—

"He," said the consular agent, "was a nice guy."

"At the last he was going back under the coffin to nail it up—with Cart inside."

Pete sat down. "To think he should have died of heart trouble, then. He thought he'd shot me, and when I walked out of the office, playing his own game—well, I wouldn't have imagined he had any heart to have trouble with—"

BUT E. E. Cartershall (that's me) had a heart to have trouble with. I sat staring at Pete so long the afternoon mellowed into twilight. I heard the consular agent chuckle, "Well, Miss Dale gets the reward," and, "That plane will stop for you both to-morrow." I heard people bidding us "*Bon soir*," and "*Mille merci*," as we departed the courtyard of the Hotel Merveilleux. I sat staring at Pete and having heart trouble.

Finally I had to light a cigarette for nonchalance.

I resigned. "Send me to the foot of the class, Pete. Why should Uncle Eli fire twice in my room and think he'd killed you when—"

"Wait." She disengaged a hand from mine; ran through a screen door into the nice hotel.

I fingered a slab of beefsteak lashed to my black eye, and waited. Presently Pete returned with an oil painting in her hand. "Southern Hospitality, by E. E. Cartershall, '34." Life size, Patricia Dale in afternoon frock with a straw hat swinging at her side. I glared like Richard Coeur de Lion.

"It was tacked to the closet door." Pete held up the canvas, tears shining in her eyes.

There were no tears in the portrait's eyes. The portrait had no eyes. Two little holes had been burned through the canvas where the painted eyes had been.

"Pete," I smiled, "do you remember promising you'd give me your word on something when this painting was finished?"

"Yes," Pete said.

"Well," I smiled, "it's finished now, all right. How about you and I—and a pent house. I insist on a pent house. We can't get too far above ground to suit me."

"Yes" Pete said.

THE END

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Wonders of the World

ERECTED in the 3rd century, B.C., during the reign of the son of Ptolemy the Great, the Pharos was considered the father of lighthouses, and one of the original Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. In determining the most durable material for its construction, numerous substances were thrown into the sea to be tested. It was found that glass withstood the ravages of wear best of all, and so massive blocks of glass were molded for the base of this amazing handiwork of man.

Planned in the form of terraces, it rose to a height of 600 feet, warning mariners against a particularly dangerous stretch of coast. At the summit a huge brazier was kept continually burning—the fuel for which packhorses carried up an inclined track ascending the tower. But of this tower only dim legends now remain, for in 1375 an earthquake sent its proud stature crashing into the sea.

The PHAROS of Alexandria

"The Father of Lighthouses"

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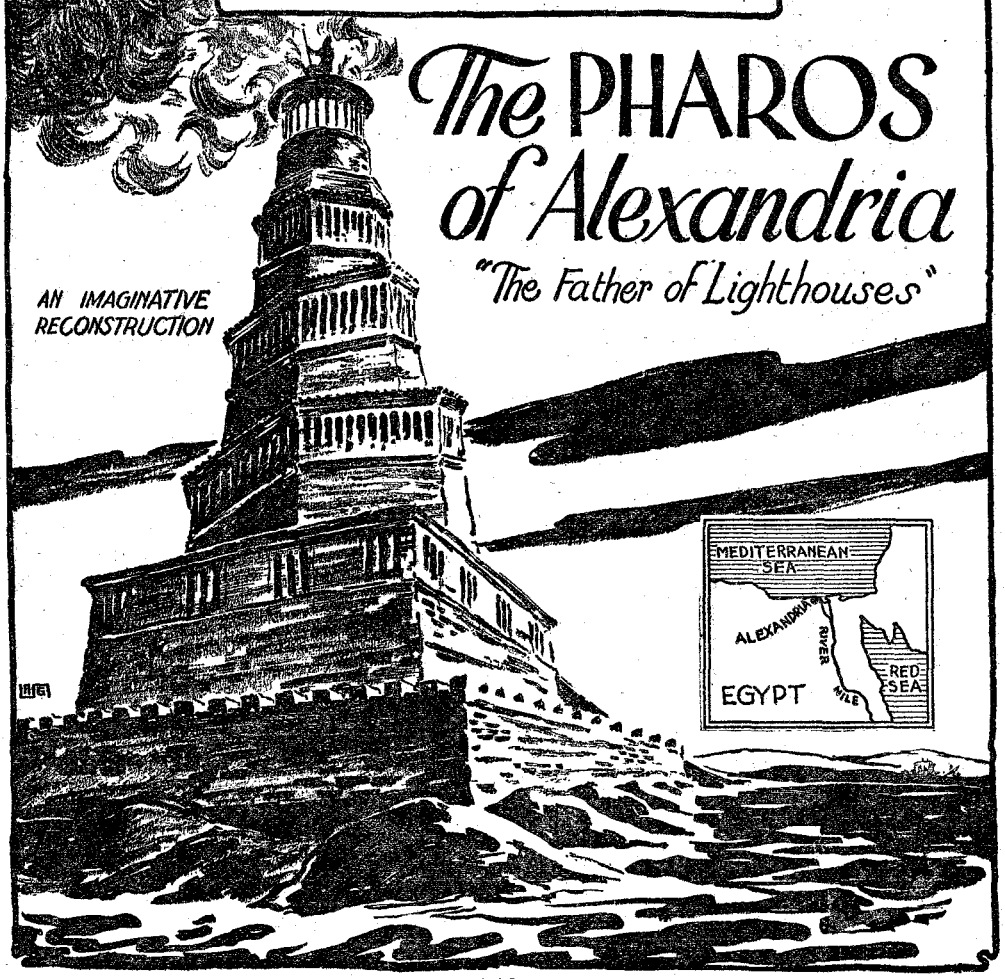

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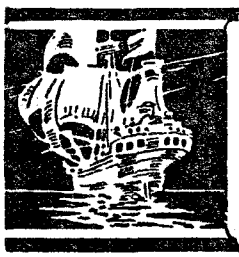

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

ARGOSY pays $1 for each letter printed. Send your letter to "Argonotes" Editor, ARGOSY, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

1935—and from all appearances it ought to be a big year for ARGOSY readers. Consider; these are some of the features which the magazine will bring to you during the next half-dozen issues:

A *Madame Storey* novelette, "The Cold Trail," by Hulbert Footner.

"Heads to Win," a startling novelette of Haiti by Robert Carse.

"Jan in India," a thrilling, three-part serial about a famous character too long away from ARGOSY's pages, written by Otis Adelbert Kline.

"The Ears of Donkey Daudette," a *Thibault Corday* French Foreign Legion novelette by Theodore Roscoe.

"Galloping Jem," a novelette of highwaymen in Old England, by H. Bedford-Jones.

"Launch Planes!" a breath-taking complete novel with a modern Navy plane-carrier for setting, written by an aviator-author who is new to ARGOSY's pages but who is already famous, George Bruce.

"Baited Cipher," Ared White's gripping story of modern war espionage.

"Strong Medicine," a *Roadrunner* novelette by Erle Stanley Gardner.

"Hashknife Pays a Debt," a Western novelette by the celebrated W. C. Tuttle.

"Magee of the Mounted," a complete novel of the R. C. M. P., by J. Allan Dunn.

And—another of those glamorous tales about *The Firebrand* of Renaissance Italy, George Challis's three-part serial, "The Great Betrayal."

Nor is that all. There will be short stories of action and adventure in various climes and settings; yarns by writers such as Bill Adams, R. V. Gery, H. H. Matteson, Charles T. Jackson, Eustace L. Adams, James Edward Grant, William Merriam Rouse, and others.

We repeat—it ought to be a big year for ARGOSY readers.—At any rate, it's a darned good beginning!

MR. DETZER'S onion knowledge:

M. L. HANNA.

Des Plaines, Ill.

Permit me to send a coupla pounds of praise for the work of Karl Detzer. Mr. Detzer understands his onions, as the remark goes. I have written enough for magazines myself to know that the stuff that emerges from his typewriter isn't as easy to turn out as some cloistered college professors imagine it to be. I don't know Mr. Detzer personally, but I think that the barrier between the author's typewriter and the far-away reader which kills the work of so many authors has been effectively demolished by Detzer. When he describes a fire, the flame fairly licks your cheek and the smoke sets your eyes a-waterin'.

HAROLD MYNNING.

HAVE you old copies to sell?

Chicago, Ill.

Will any reader having copies of the following Munsey magazines please get in touch with me, as I would like to buy them if they are the copies that I want. The magazines that I want are as follow: The *Cavalier Monthly* for July, August, October and November, 1911. *Allstory Monthly*

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for March, June, July, August, November and December, 1913, and for January and February, 1914. *Allstory-Cavalier Weekly* for March 7, 14, 21 and 28, 1914. *The Scrap Book* for April, May, June, July, August, September, October and November, 1909. *Allstory Weekly* for October 12, 1918. *Cavalier Weekly* for August 24, 1912. *Allstory Monthly* for June, 1909. Send all letters to the address printed below.

FRANK SOLTIS,
5313 So. Washtenaw Ave.,
Chicago, Ill.

A KICK against kickers:

Hartford, Conn.

I have now been reading the Argosy for the past five years, and would never have written you were it not for the fact that some of these crank letters which you print make me see red by their constant complaints against this writer or that story.

We all have our likes and dislikes and it is only natural that a story which would appeal to one person would not appeal to another. But is that any reason for panning it?

As far as I'm concerned (and I know a great many others agree with me) if you just keep printing the same type of stories you have up to now, you will continue to put out the most popular magazine on the market.

How about another science-fiction novel?

Sincerely, R. A. ALLARD.

WEEKLY cruises:

Elyria, O.

Back in the Gay Nineties, when I sported a bustle and bangs, and a long gown trailing both "fore and aft," I took my first cruise on the good ship ARGOSY. But in my wanderings over the face of the earth I lost track of it until about ten years ago, when it came again to my notice. Then I wore my gown shortened to knee-length and my hair in bob. Ever since, I have taken my regular weekly sail—if I can raise the necessary ten-cent fare—on the same old ship, now grown larger and better with the passing years.

Mr. Skipper, whether she sails north, south, east or west, do not change her course or heed the groans of a few seasick passengers. There are always some on board who will cry, "Please, Mr. Captain, stop the ship. I want to get off and walk." They should confine their sea trips to ferry crossings.

CORA CLIFFORD.

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The gruesome things that happened to the military in voodoo-ridden Haiti. A novelette by

ROBERT CARSE

SAILORS DRINK MILK — an amusing tale of sailor life by — **BILL ADAMS**

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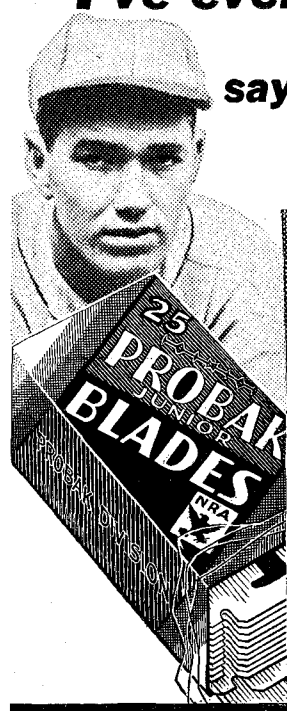

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"The man on the INS news desk has a high-pressure job," says Ray Baker. "A big story breaks and I am on the desk for ten hours... twelve hours...working at top speed! The most enjoyable way of easing the strain that I know is smoking Camels. Whenever I feel 'all in' Camels bring back my pep, and I can tackle the next big story with renewed energy!

For over ten years I've preferred Camels. They have a distinctive flavor that just suits me. And I can smoke Camels continually without jangled nerves."

Science confirms the experience of smokers regarding Camel's "energizing effect." You can smoke them freely. Camel's matchless blend of costlier tobaccos never upsets the nerves!

HOCKEY STAR. "*Bill*" Cook, Captain of the famous N. Y. Rangers, says: "I guard my nerves and yet smoke all I want because I smoke only Camels. Their taste sure hits the spot!"

BUSINESS GIRL. Eve L. Miller says: "I started to smoke Camels because I appreciate mildness and delicacy of flavor. And I found that Camels give me a 'lift' when my energy is low."

Camel's costlier Tobaccos never get on your Nerves!

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